

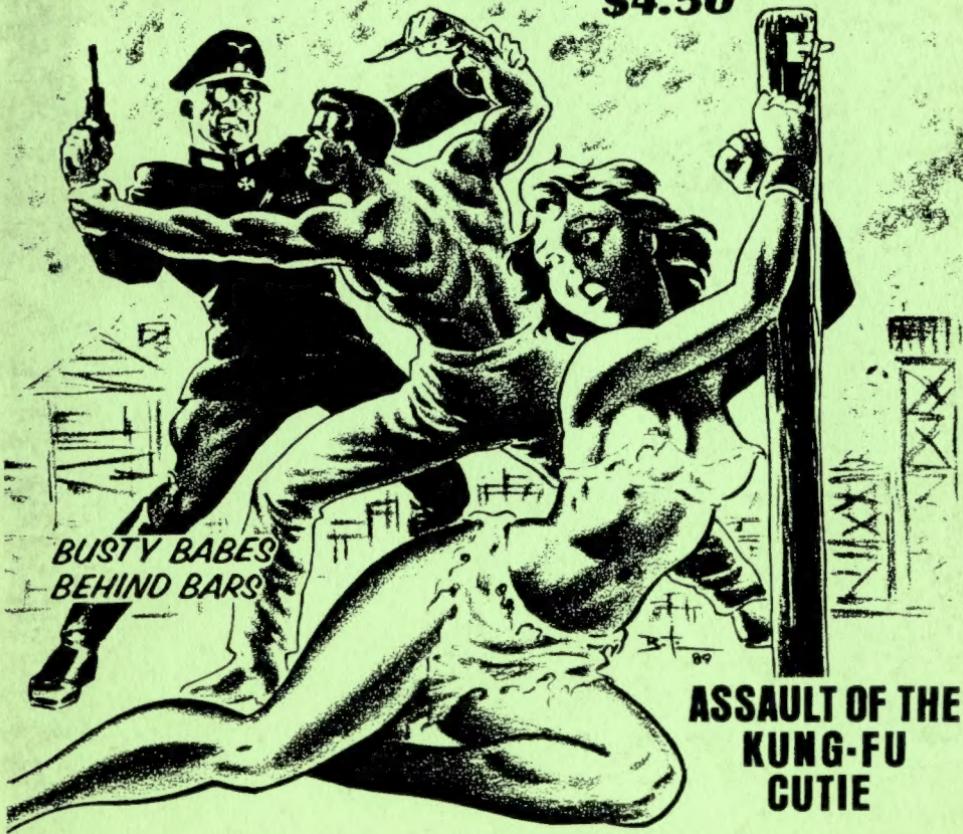
I FOUGHT A MAN-EATING GRIZZLY BEAR!

MAN'S GUTS

**ESCAPE FROM
SAVAGE ISLAND**

STALKED BY
SEX-STARVED
VOODOO GIRLS!

\$4.50



**ASSAULT OF THE
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CUTIE**

MAN'S GUTS

Number One

*

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EDITORIAL

The commies are taking over, and the impotent pinkos are letting 'em do it! The old America that real men could be proud of is, old buddies, slipping through our calloused fingers! Soviet microwave spy satellites and limp-wristed panty-waisted rock singers are sapping the vitality of the young, snot-nosed brats you and I fought the Big One for! So what're we gonna do about it?

Why, pick up a magazine and escape our troubles, of course! And why not a mag that'll conjure up that macho world no one ever lived in except in their imaginations? You know, the kind you and Cliff Clavin used to buy at the newsstands, with titles like Wildcat

Adventure, True Men, Argosy, Man's Action, Man's Daring, Man's Life, in short, the "men's adventure" magazines, the "macho mags."

You say there ain't any of these mags around anymore? Guess you're right; guess there's the commies and their stooges to blame for that, too. Well, never fear! There's one left! And this is it! You're holding a thrill-packed, laugh-loaded issue of Man's Guts magazine, the mag for real he-men, or more likely anemic wimps who wish they were! Since no non-inflated three-dimensional woman will give you the time of day, feast your eyes on the well-endowed babes in these pages! Then go out and bash some 80's "sensitive males"!

Gil Matson

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KAMIKAZE NUDES OF THE

SECRET PACIFIC EMPIRE

by Pierre Comtois

The whole story started when the U.S.S. Higgins weighed anchor at the SONYUS in the Midway group. I remember that day like it was yesterday, a sky so blue and featureless you'd never think pollution was wearing holes through the atmosphere like all those scientists keep telling us; the sea smooth and calm like opaque glass, the Higgins absolutely still on its surface; not a bird in the sky and the only sound breaking the peaceful scene was the clank of the winches as they let down the amtraks from off the side of the ship.

I took my cover off my head and blinked into the sun, then leaned on the rail and watched the first amtrak hit the water with a dull splash; the rings in the water it made drifted outward thickly and disappeared. It hadn't taken as long as I thought to get out here and now that we were, I found that I couldn't wait to get ashore. I took my eyes from the sailors scurrying over the amtrak and looked up at the little island that could just be made out from where the Higgins was positioned.

Just about a mile square, SONYUS island was uninhabited as was the chain of even smaller islands that ringed it. But it was because of those islands that the Higgins couldn't get any closer to SONYUS than it was now. The smaller, outlying islands were actually the parts of a long coral reef that just happened to break the surface of the surrounding ocean; it was that reef, completely encircling the island, that kept the Higgins from just going right up to SONYUS and knocking at the door, and why

me and my men, marine amphibious unit 347, had to go in with the amtraks. With the amphibious vehicles, it'd be a cinch to make our way to the reef, cross over it with the belly treads of the amtraks and then just wade in to the beach.

Yeah, simple; but then came the tricky part. The brass wanted the island cleared of civilians; okay, no problem. The SONYUS Atoll was desolate as far as anyone knew. But then about three months ago, some islanders from another chain, fishing in the area, were fired on from the direction of the island. Not being the shy type, they made their way ashore to do unto others, but they were beaten back by superior firepower. They weren't cowards, but they weren't stupid either; they hightailed it straight to the nearest U.S. Navy vessel and reported what they saw. When they were finished, Command knew they had another "last son of Nippon" on their hands. It was common knowledge that for years since the end of the war with the Japanese, some of their soldiers refused to believe it had all come to an end. Year after year, some native or other would stumble across one of these oldsters in some forgotten portion of a jungled island and they'd have to be convinced to give themselves up. So it wasn't too difficult for Command to believe the story. Unfortunately they had plans for the SONYUS Atoll that didn't include inhabitants of any kind.

So there I was, a DI fresh out of Lejeune, with the first real active duty I've had in years, and

I have to go and lead a bunch of greenies against a man my father probably faced a generation ago. It wasn't the sort of action I was thinking of when I re-upped, but it'd do. I took a last drag on my Lucky and flicked it out over the water. For a second I thought it a shame to ruin that perfect sheen, but I forgot all about it when I heard my name being called from below decks.

"Sarge, hey Sarge!" It was Cpl. Stanley, coming up like gangbusters from the ladder. "Oh, there you are. The Navy guys say we're all set to go."

I grunted and followed him below decks, relieved to get out of the hot sun. In another few minutes I was having the men doublecheck their equipment before going over the side and getting a last earful from the young lieutenant in Navy knakis who insisted on following the book.

"So be sure you bring along enough emergency signal flares, ammunition and survival rations and . . ."

"Look, son, I know my job, now why don't you just run along and me and my men'll take care of ourselves."

His face purpled at that, but before he could say anything more I heard the captain's voice call from his position on the deck overhead. "That'll be all, lieutenant; you're wanted in the radar room."

"Aye, sir," said the lieutenant and retreated into the hot belly of the ship. I looked up at the captain. He saluted loosely and nodded.

"Okay, you lunkheads, saddle up and over. And make damn sure you get on the 'trak in one piece or I'll throw you to the sharks. I'll be damned if I have to write a letter to your mamas telling 'em how their baby boy got himself squished between the 'trak and the bulkhead."

I was darn pleased to see the

practiced ease with which those twenty guys went over the side and clambered aboard the amtrak. Not bad, just like any professional. I hated to admit it, especially to them, but I was pretty proud of those greenies.

After I found my spot in the rear of the amtrak next to the sailor or sitting in the steering position, I had the men settle down and hold their stomachs. It didn't take long for the amtrak to circle out away from the Higgins and then to make its way toward a break between two of the outlying islands. In another few minutes we all felt the sudden thump of the vehicle's belly as it came up against the sunken reef and slid back down on the inside of the atoll. There was some cursing from up front where one of the men vomited amid the laughs of those more fortunate to be in the back. I only let it go on for a minute before I ordered them to shut up and get into their assault crouches. The end of the ride came a lot sooner than even I thought as the amtrak rubbed up onto the beach and the sailor let down the debarking ramp.

"Go, go, go!" I yelled. But I needn't have bothered. The men's adrenaline was pumping like mad and they burst out of the cramped space of the amtrak and onto the beach like prisoners with commuted sentences.

I moved straight ahead toward the line of trees while the men spread out in a vague crescent movement on my flanks. I grinned at their performance; just like boot camp. But I hardly had time to congratulate myself on the way I had whipped them into shape before everything fell apart.

Almost as soon as the men entered the treeline, I felt there was something wrong somewhere. It was nothing I could put my finger on, but I felt it in my bones nevertheless. But there was no way I was going to turn back because of some "feel-

ing" I had, so I just signaled the others to slow down and advance with caution. We continued to move farther into the jungle.

Suddenly there was a shot off to the right, then the left of the line. I shouted commands to take cover, but it was too late; before I knew it, half of the men were taken out and the others were scattered as they tried to find cover and return fire at the same time. At first I couldn't see a damn thing, but in a few minutes I began to make out movement in the dense foliage farther ahead. I sent a few rounds of M-16 fire towards the disturbance and had the satisfaction of hearing the shells ripping through foliage and meat accompanied by cries of dying men. A few more bursts from my gun allowed me to get up and dash to better cover and a quick look around showed two of my men not three feet away. They were dead, all right, but not in any way that I would have thought. Sure, I believed the story about the old Jap holed up somewhere out here, but the evidence of my own eyes told me he wasn't alone. I definitely saw more than one figure in the foliage up ahead and had heard more than a single man yell out when I hit them before. But the one thing I didn't expect was for the Japs to have anything near the firepower we had. After all, they were supposed to be doddering holdovers from the Second World War! The most they could have were some rusty carbines. Looking at the mangled corpses of my men, I knew I was up against something a lot more powerful than that.

The two men lying there were completely unrecognizable to me because their bodies were nothing but a blackened husk, like the charcoal briquettes you use in your hibachi. But the thing that hit me the most was the fact that their clothing was completely untouched by whatever it was that zapped them.

As clean and dry as they were when they put them on that morning. It was almost as if they'd been struck with a massive jolt of electricity. But those were the only speculations I had time for before I had to look out for my own neck.

I hadn't noticed it before, but I now heard the distinct sound of crackling energy, like the sound lightning makes in a thunderstorm. There were more screams off to my right and I knew it was the last of my men. Suddenly the collected anger and frustration of the last few minutes came up in me in a rush, and in a blind, unthinking rage I stood up behind the tree I had been using for cover and sprayed the jungle in front of me with hot lead. In another minute, I was breaking through the tangle of vines and branches, shredding the rest with bursts of my rifle. I knew I was doing some damage as I heard the grunts and moans of the wounded all around me, but that was all I had time for as suddenly a branch snapped back and whacked me in the face, slapping my eyeballs. I gasped and fell back, rubbing at my stinging eyes.

I was still practically blind when I felt rough hands take hold of me and drag me to my feet. More hands passed over me as they relieved me of my equipment and pistol, another hand lingered and pressed my crotch to the general amusement of my captors. Then they began to speak to one another, probably about what to do with me, when I got my second big surprise of the day: they were the unmistakable, high-pitched voices of women!

Finally my vision cleared, and slowly, from a blur to clarity, my captors came into focus. At first, all I saw was the brownish khaki of the old Imperial Japanese Army uniform, then the duller color of deeply tanned flesh. At last my vision was almost normal; I blinked away the tears and tried

to shrug away from the grasp of two of my captors as they held me tightly under the arms. Their grip tightened as I looked up angrily at the others standing around me. They were almost all women! Beautiful Japanese broads! Don't believe me if you want, but I know what I saw. Out of about ten of the Japs there, eight of them were these luscious chicks all decked out like they were right out of the Imperial Japanese Army officer corps; decked out in perfect period uniforms except for helmets. Instead, they were bareheaded, with their long straight hair tied in pony tails down their backs. And honest, they must have been the most perfectly shaped broads I'd ever seen. Not an ounce of extra weight on them! Everything they had was perfect for their height, size and shape. If I didn't know better, I'd have sworn they weren't human!

But I didn't have the time to check them out as thoroughly as I would have liked to; the two males with them grunted something, and one of the chicks whipped off her belt and moved over behind me. It's a good thing she didn't lose her britches, or I would've been in danger of selling out to them! As it was, the two dames holding me loosened their grip and the third chick tied my hands behind my back. I gave a fast thought of making a break for it, but decided to wait. They obviously wanted me alive or they wouldn't have tied me up. After all, how did they know how many more of us would be following my group in to the island?

So I was shoved deeper into the jungle, the men at the head of the file, and the chicks trailing out behind them, me in the center. In a few minutes, we hit a narrow trail and veered off to what I guessed to be the island's highest elevation, a small knoll at its eastern end.

It wasn't a long walk, but it was enough for the insects to begin

trying to eat me alive; and with my hands tied, all I could do was grin and bear it. I tried to keep my mind off them by studying my surroundings, but there wasn't much to see, and if I got the opportunity I could've found my way back to the beach with my eyes closed anyway. So it was the easiest thing in the world to let my eyes take in the chicks that walked in front of me. I cursed silently at the uniforms that hid most of their charms, but there was enough tension in them to let the girls' most interesting features have full play: there wasn't a bra-wearer in the bunch. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before my more professional instincts took over and I began to take notice of the weapons that hung across their backs. At first, I just took them to be ordinary automatic weapons, but on closer inspection I saw that they were nothing of the kind. Small and compact, and light enough for any woman to handle with ease, their rifles weren't ordinary at all. For the first time I associated the blackened bodies of my greenies with the guns that burnt them, and I nursed a healthy hate for their sleek barrels and the funny-looking energy cells forming their body. They were small and lightweight, but I didn't doubt their deadly potential.

Before I knew it, my little hike ended and the lead girls moved aside some brush from the base of the knoll, revealing a low, black hole in its side. At first I thought we'd have to go in on all fours, but the first man just walked straight on and sank into the earth. When my turn came, I saw that there was a hidden stairway that led steeply downward, and I almost fell in from the encouraging shove I got from one of the girls. When I caught my balance, I was already at the bottom and blinking my eyes against the glare of fluorescent lighting. A heavy metal hatch

slammed closed over the entrance, and the rest of the party joined us at the bottom.

There were some grunts from one of the men as he pointed to a set of lockers by the stairs, then at the girls. I was wondering what was going on, when to my shock and delight the girls began to remove their uniforms! I couldn't believe my eyes as first one then another and another of those chicks stripped down to their skivvies and placed their discarded uniforms in the lockers and quick-marched away into one of the few other tunnels that branched off from the one we were in. Of course I was disappointed; those chicks were the most perfectly shaped morsels I'd ever seen! And I've been to all the best places: Hanoi, Manila, Tokyo, you name it!

But I hardly had the time to look after those luscious legs when out of a different tunnel comes an even weirder sight: two more chicks, no less perfectly formed but a good six inches taller than the others and decked out in some kind of samurai armor like you see in those cheap Kung Fu movies. Breast plates and mail skirts that barely hid the darkness between their legs, metal shod greaves like gladiators used to wear, and a big, curving sword that they kept clenched in their fists. When they drew up to me, their almond-shaped eyes drilled right into mine so that I couldn't take my gaze off of them. Only the sudden slap of their swords on their breast plates brought me back, and I heard more grunts in that Jap lingo from the men. In another second, the two broads had me under the arms and were half dragging me down the corridor they'd come from.

Between stumbling and trying to keep up with the girls' long strides, I tried to take in more details of the place I was being held in. It turned out to be a huge underground complex with dozens, hell!, maybe hundreds of rooms!

I couldn't help comparing the place to the tunnel networks I'd heard the Japs built on Tarawa and Okinawa during World War II, but bigger, lots bigger. And crammed with all sorts of electronic gear, too; workshops with rows of long tables filled with miniaturized tools and parts and warehouse-sized places piled up with heavy, industrial equipment and other, more specialized rooms loaded up with fancy stuff I couldn't recognize at all except to think that it looked like ordnance right out of Buck Rogers or something. And remembering what those weird guns did to my men, I didn't think I was far off the mark. And everywhere I saw chicks, beautiful dolls, all in their skivvies, thin little things that hung loose from their shoulders to just over their navels, and wrinkly panties that hugged their waists, working at the shops and moving around the hallways. I saw men, too, but they had to be outnumbered twenty to one! Whatever this outfit was, they had it over the old Corps hands down!

Anyway, I was taken to what I figured for one of the lowest levels of the complex, where the chicks stopped in front of a pair of sliding glass doors and one of the men still with us slipped inside. I couldn't see past the doors as their panes were thick with steam, but I caught a whiff from inside and sensed the familiar smell of a shower or locker room. I was really beginning to wonder just what the hell was going on there when the doors slid open and I was dragged inside.

My first impressions turned out to be right; the first thing that caught my attention was the big pool that filled most of the room. I could hear the dull splashes of people somewhere in it, but couldn't see them yet because of the thick swirls of steam clouds that moved over the water. As I moved farther into the room and along the side of the pool, holes opened in the

steam and I began to see Jap men here and there in the water, moving around for a better look at me. I guess it shouldn't have surprised me by this time, but it still did: each man in that pool had a couple of girls hovering around him, casually rubbing his back and legs, wiping the sweat from his face and some even being carried through the water by girls with their arms interlocked beneath the man's buttocks. That's the life! I thought. From what I could tell, the men were naked and the girls wore only a kind of loose diaper around their hips. Slowly, they all congregated near one side of the pool where another man, young, not over thirty-five years old, sat swathed in a big towel with a girl massaging his neck and shoulders and another holding a glass of wine or something to his lips. A dozen other men stood and sat around him watching me being prodded in their direction.

I didn't need a picture to be drawn for me: this guy was the big kahuna and he wanted information out of me, like what interest did the U.S. Navy have in his island? The thought of all that dangerous hardware I spotted on the way down didn't make me feel much like chatting, so I knew I was in for a tough time until I could think of a way out of this nutty Jap tea house.

A vicious smile curled the edges of the Jap's mouth. "So, we have an American visitor. I'm flattered." For some reason, I was surprised he spoke English and my face must have shown it, because he continued: "Of course I speak English, dog. You Americans will never change! You're so convinced of your own superiority that you're continually surprised to find that others can match you. And we Japanese have done so at every turn! We have outdone you as a matter of fact! But all our efforts are wasted in simple economic competition."

One of the men whispered in his ear and he smiled again. I didn't

know anything about him, but already I hated that smile. He flicked a finger and the man disappeared; then he turned his gaze back at me and watched. Suddenly there was movement at the edge of the crowd and it parted to let in the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. And not just in that place, I mean anywhere! Black hair that fell absolutely straight past her waist, smooth, flawless skin of that hue that wasn't quite white and wasn't quite brown, long firm legs that tapered to strong but dainty feet. She was wearing the shift and panties I saw the women in the upper floors wearing, but that didn't keep me from appreciating the shape of her tits as they managed to hold out the light fabric of the shift away from her chest and belly. My heart skipped a beat when she glanced shyly my way and immediately cast her eyes to the floor.

The Jap sitting down reached over, grabbed her hair in his hand and yanked her viciously to the ground. She let out a short cry of pain before she hit the floor, and I took an involuntary step forward. The Jap, of course, saw me, as he had not once taken his eyes from mine. Knowing the girl was somewhere at his feet, he leaned forward and placed a bare foot on her throat. Presently I heard soft gasps coming from the girl's mouth. The Jap's foot stayed put.

"You Americans have taught my people well, yes, you have. You've taught them to meet you on your own terms, and they have. They have beaten you on your own terms. But the cost was high! We have lost our cultural pride, our cultural identity. Traded it for the cheap baubles of western materialism. Our people grow softer by the year; our own fathers would hardly recognize their children for the descendants of the glorious Samurai and Shogun!"

He relaxed and leaned back by thrusting against the inert form of the girl at his feet. "And I

am not the least to blame. I have created a multi-billion dollar empire in the East-West trade. As have others like me. But we soon came to see what a hollow victory it was to claim all those riches and to have no honor. We saw how soft and flabby our people were becoming as the years continued to go by; how even the slightest mention of increased military spending would throw the country into a paroxysm of pacific wrath. I and my fellow industrialists"--he held out his arms to include the other men standing by--"have banded together in the name of Nippon Resurgent! We will pool our resources to create an invincible army that will reclaim first our homeland, then the Pacific basin that is our rightful heritage, and then strike down hated America in holy revenge!"

He waved an arm again. "Look around you! You've no doubt enslaved over our women since entering our domain, just as you've taken them on the home islands. They are the result of limited post-pubescent genetic alteration. We have created the perfect female species. Subservient, strong, fertile; the mothers of the future rulers of Nippon. Of course, others"--he rolled the girl's face toward me with his foot--"are not so perfect."

He barked something in Japanese and the girl dragged herself to her knees to face him. He said something else, and she picked up his foot and raised it to her mouth. At first I thought she was going to kiss it, but instead she put one toe at a time in her mouth, her jaws and teeth working carefully around them. The Jap kept his eyes on me the whole time, saying, "Make sure you clean them thoroughly, Kyoki, otherwise I will have your teeth for a necklace." If I didn't hate the man before, I absolutely loathed him then! To humiliate an exquisite creature like that the way he did! I wanted nothing more than to kill the bas-

tard right there, but my hands were still tied and I was surrounded by armed guards. The Jap barked some orders to my guards and as they began to take me away, he said in English, "I will be having a more in-depth interview with you later, American, and you had better have the answers I seek."

The last thing I saw before being forced from the room was the sight of that girl still bending over that monster's feet and the laughing, joking crowd closing around them in a tight circle.

The only thing that let me get through the next few hours of imprisonment was the thought that somehow I'd get revenge for what that Jap scum did to that girl, and revenge, too, for what he did to my boys on the beach the day before. And I had plenty of time to think about it, because no sooner was I taken out of the steam room than I was tossed into a small cell -- it couldn't have been more than ten feet square in all--and left to think about what I'd tell the Jap leader when he asked for me. Which would be nothing as far as I was concerned. But that didn't mean I was going to hang around and find out how I'd stand up to torture, either. Unfortunately, that cell was well built. The walls were of seamless concrete and the door solid steel with only a slot-panel at the foot for slipping my food through. It was well lit with a light source that was never out; I figured that was part of the torture, but it was offset a little by the presence of a cot with a springy mattress on it. I didn't know how long I was in there, and after a short nap I lost whatever sense of time I had left. It didn't help me any to know that the crew aboard the Higgins was still waiting for me and could send a search party ashore at any time.

Anyway, I had woken up and eaten the meal I found on the floor near the door and was giving the room the once-over when a scraping sound

behind me grabbed my attention. I spun in the direction of the door just in time to see a figure in a white kimono slip into the room and close the door. I had just enough time to take one step toward the guy when he turned and threw back the hood that hid his face. Then I saw that it wasn't a guy after all! In fact it was the last person I could have expected: it was the chick from the steam room, the one the Jap had kicked around.

I was speechless for a minute, but when she saw that I was about to open my mouth, she raised her hand and spoke. "I have come to help you escape, but first I have to know, can you get us off the island?"

Boy, talk about your guardian angels! This chick looked every inch an angel, and now she was rescuing me! It didn't take me long to give her my answer. "I'll swim us off if that's what it takes. There's a U.S. Navy cruiser anchored just beyond the reef. Even if we do have to swim for it, we ought to make it easy."

She thought about that a minute, then said, "It is good. I will help you, but first you must prove yourself worthy. Tell me, are you a real man? A man of honor and strength?"

I didn't know what the hell she was talking about then. What did all that have to do with us getting out of here? Then I told her so. "Listen, I don't know what kind of screwy dame you are, but if you want out of this rathole, then I'm with you. Just say it yes or no." I was getting set to jump her if she changed her mind, but her next words caught me by surprise.

"I do want to escape, but it cannot be so simple. I have my own code of honor, my own concept of Bushido to live by. My father taught me that at least. I will allow no man into my confidence who cannot best me first in combat."

"You mean you want me to wrestle

you? What, two throws out of three?"

"Your flippancy is wasted with me, American. My father was an honorable of the house Ikito, an old and ancient lineage. He taught his children the value of honor and the value of dying for it."

"Now you're sounding like that Jap nut in the steam room."

She lowered her eyes. "He is my brother."

"Your brother!" I cried. "And he did . . . that . . . to you? Humiliated you the way he did? You call that honor?"

"In a way, I understand him. He was taught by father as well. It was who drove him into his present enterprise, and myself as well. In the beginning it was to be his genius and wealth, and my body."

"Your body? What do you mean?" I didn't like the way the conversation was going.

"I am the living incarnation of the Nippon Mother. It was from me that the genetic material was removed, mutated and transplanted in pre-pubescent girls. By the time they had passed their pubescent period, the genetic matter had become part of their physiological make-up, and reformed them into the perfect vessels for the future rulers of Nippon Resurgent."

It was fantastic, unbelievable, but if it was true, those lunatics couldn't have picked a better model for their army of girls. "But why did your brother treat you the way he did?"

She straightened then and looked directly into my eyes. "Because I would not stand by while he treated the mothers of Nippon in the demeaning manner he did. My protests became more and more insistent until one day I broached the society's protocol and upbraided him before his fellow industrialists. He has returned the humiliation a thousandfold since then."

I was quiet there for a minute until, "So do you still think we



ought to fight?" I half hoped our little heart-to-heart would have gotten that idea out of her system, but it was no go.

"We must; I could not sully the honor of my father." With that, she threw back her kimono, revealing the strange armor I'd seen on the other dames. She pulled free her sword and said, "Remove your clothing."

"What? Why?"

"It is the way. You must be completely unarmed, no hidden weapons are allowed."

I thought it was stupid, and felt kind of silly doing it, but I complied. "What about you? It's not very honorable to go into combat against an unarmed man with a sword."

"Remove your clothing."

I shut up, realizing that if I was ever going to get out of here, she was my only chance; it'd be a whole lot easier if I had her to show me the way out of those tunnels.

Finally I got my scivvies off and straightened, not without noticing her eyes move slowly over my body. She was impressed. Then she shook herself, tossed her sword on the cot, and assumed a fighting stance. "Defend yourself, soldier. Defeat me, and we go. Lose, and I leave you here."

"I got news for you, sister, I'm out of here no matter what you think." Before the last word was out of my mouth, I was under her guard and had an arm between her legs. The leverage was there, and I intended to lift her up and down onto the cot, but it never came out that way. She scissored her legs together, catching my arm, and reached for the other. Easy as pie, she bent me back, exposing my throat, and let fly with a karate chop to the adam's apple. I twisted enough for the blow to glance off my skull, sending sparks through my head, but it was enough for me to drag her onto me as I fell to the floor.

Her breast plates and metal links of her skirt ground painfully into my flesh, but my arm was still between her legs, so all I had to do was flip her over onto her back. I had her almost completely upside-down, and ready to slam her back, when she made a grab for my crotch. I have to admit, I didn't expect such a low blow from someone who claimed to be honorable, but I didn't wait until she had me in her grip, either. Guilty until proven innocent in a fight, I always say. So I let her go and slapped the hand away while she collapsed in a heap and rolled away.

We were both on our feet in seconds, and she wasted no time in coming at me again. It was all I could do to sidestep her rush, but just the same, this time, she swung her arm and caught me good. I doubled over with a grunt and got a good swift kick in the ass for it from those metal sandals she wore. I fell forward, hitting my head on the corner of the cot, and the next thing I knew she had me around the neck, with one arm pinned behind me and a knee twisting into my back. I think I felt a couple of vertebrae grind together before I got my brains together and grabbed her sword from the cot. It may not have been strictly within the rules, but neither was her armor. I didn't even bother to look where her head was, but just swung the hilt over my own. I knew she was right behind me, and whack! I got her.

She reeled back and I managed to get to my feet and turn. She was standing there, holding her head, when I charged. I knee to the abdomen took the wind out of her and a flying kick knocked her legs aside, throwing her onto the cot. I dove and pinned her there, not really knowing how the fight was supposed to end.

She was still groggy, and as my face wasn't two inches from hers, I could see that she'd have some nice bruises come morning. But

right then, she was still the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen; in fact, the sweat that sheened her legs and arms and rivered along her face and body made her a whole lot more enticing to me. I smelled her body odor, the thick muskiness that comes with exertion or sex, and I think that that's what made me do what I did next.

I planted a good one on her mouth. Not the dainty kind of kiss you give your best girl, but a raw, hungry one that seemed to suck up her whole insides. In another second, I plucked away her breast plates and tore apart her metal skirt, then I took another drink from her mouth. Of course she resisted; it was like trying to hold down a hurricane. But I wrapped an arm around her head, pinning her mouth to mine, and gave her a rough massage across her back and thighs with the other. I felt the excess perspiration run over my hand when it slid and squeezed at her buttocks and tits. In a few minutes we both calmed down, and the visit to the oasis became more congenial. In fact, once settled down, it was hard to get her mouth away from mine. But we managed when I turned to get those damned combat boots of her feet: they were beating up my legs something fierce. She didn't seem to mind the hiatus, keeping herself busy between my legs. At last her breathing got more regular and I was able to take more time with her. I got her legs open and slipped in. She scissored me again with those long legs, but this time I had the opportunity to enjoy it.

Finally I was through, and pulled away. At first she didn't know what I was up to, probably thought I was changing position or something, but when she saw me reaching for my clothes, she sprang up and grabbed hold of my arm. I shrugged her off and she tried again, this time offering me one of her tits, bringing it close to my mouth. I bit it and she squealed, falling back onto the cot.

"That's enough, baby," I said. "Time to get out of here."

She pouted, examining her breast where red teeth marks were already spreading.

I scooped up her kimono and tossed it to her. There was no way she was going to get those plates and the skirt back on.

She wriggled into the kimono and said, "We should not have dawdled so long, it must be nearly dawn now."

"Sorry, baby," I said, "but you're not exactly made to ignore."

She smiled despite herself and stood up. "At first, I did not want your . . . attentions," she looked me in the eyes, "but now, I'm glad you had your way with me."

"So am I; now how do we get out of this madhouse?"

She moved to the door and opened it. When we stepped into the hall outside, I saw the figure of a girl slouched in a chair, the top half of her body leaning far out over the arm; her camisole was gathered around her armpits, revealing her breasts, spread out like huge, perfect saucers. I almost forgot the dish I had in hand when Kyoki spoke. "She will remain unconscious for hours longer, but we should still leave this area as quickly as possible."

As we moved down the corridor, I decided to ask her a couple of questions that were on my mind. "How did you manage to get away yourself?"

She stopped at a juncture of two halls and said, "Without a boat, there is no way to escape the island. My brother knew that, and so I was not closely guarded. He knew he could summon me for another humiliation any time he chose. In fact the only chance I took tonight was that he might send for me for just such an event."

"So for all you know, you might be wanted right now."

"I doubt it. These corridors are too quiet; if my absence was known, they would be in an uproar."

She turned down one of the corridors, and we reached a flight of stairs. She didn't waste any time in flying down them, and when we reached the bottom I grabbed hold of her arm and stopped her.

"Wait a minute--I haven't been in this place longer than a few hours, but even I know we're not headed for the surface; we're going deeper."

"Quiet! Now listen. The corridors above are too well lit. I am all right, but you would be spotted in an instant. Our only chance is to reach the power room and dim the lights along our route."

"Why not all of them?"

"Because that would surely alert the guards to there being something wrong. A partial power outage happens here every now and then when some experiments are going on. With luck, that is what will be thought while we make our way to the exit. Also, in the dimness it will be easier to mask our identities."

I had to hand it to her, she'd thought of everything. So I let her have her head, and in no time we reached the power room. There was only one chick there, and Kyoki decoyed her in her kimono and took her out easy; then she pulled the plug on certain connections in the power panel. Sure enough, the corridor outside got darker, but not dark enough so's you couldn't see where you were going.

It took less time than I thought to get to the main corridor near the surface, and there still wasn't much commotion going on, not even any sirens. I guess Kyoki was right again; no one was too concerned. That's what comes of overconfidence, a lesson I'd learned the hard way, and at the cost of my men's lives! Anyway, we got to the head of the hallway that led to the antechamber with the lockers near the exit when Kyoki stopped me with an upraised arm. She held her finger to her lips and motioned me to look around the corner to the stairway that led to the surface. I looked and

saw two armored chicks standing there with those funny electric guns. Although they didn't seem too concerned about the lights, they still blocked our escape up the stairs.

"Go on up to them like you did in the power room," I whispered to Kyoki. "Get them to turn their heads away from here so I can sneak up and surprise them. You can handle the one on the right, I'll take the left." She nodded without a word and walked slowly out toward the guards.

They saw her right away, but didn't act too surprised. They let her get right up to them and when she started to talk, she kind of sidled over to the right, drawing their looks away from the mouth of the hallway where I stood waiting. When they were facing away from me, I didn't waste any time; I ran on tiptoe the short distance and rammed my shoulder in the back of the nearest of the two. I hit her so hard, she hit the wall a few inches away with a smack that knocked any sense out of her. I didn't wait to watch her body slide to the floor, but turned to the other broad. I didn't need to worry too much, as Kyoki had her kimono over the guard's head, blinding her while she drew the woman's sword. I didn't like it, even with these poor bastards, but I watched as Kyoki put two feet of cold steel between that girl's ribs and yanked. Blood was everywhere and so were her dying screams. Immediately, there were yells and warnings from the different halls leading from that spot.

I didn't waste any time in grabbing Kyoki and hauling her up the stairs. She tried to make a grab for her kimono, but I didn't give her any time. In a few seconds we were at the top of the stairs and I was pushing against the steel hatch, swearing and cursing. All the time those shouts were getting closer and the sweat began to pour from my body and I felt Kyoki's

buttocks press against mine as she backed away from the lower part of the tunnel. At last I got the hatch open and we tumbled outside.

Sunshine and overpowering heat hit me like a physical blow and all I wanted to do was to flop over and rest, but there wasn't any time; I could hear those high piercing shouts and the bump and scrape of metal armor almost at my heels.

I had Kyoki by the arm and together we dashed crazily through the surrounding underbrush, the branches and thorns tearing and scratching at my skin and tattered uniform. If I'd had the time, I'd have spared some pity for Kyoki's exposed flesh, but couldn't. The breath was suddenly coming in short gasps from my mouth and I felt unaccountably weak in the legs, probably the first signs of malaria. But the sudden burst of crackling fire and sizzling bolts of electricity from behind us, exploding to our right and left, was all I needed to keep going.

Finally the jungle thinned and we fell onto the beach. I almost yelled for joy and felt new strength come along, like a second wind. I didn't waste any time thinking about what to do--I just pushed Kyoki ahead of me into the water and waded out after her. "Start swimming for those islands out there! The Higgins ought to be just in sight from out there."

"I . . . will . . . try," she managed to gasp. Poor thing, she was completely worn out by that run; and the tussle we had back in the cell hadn't helped her any, either. But she kept going, and in a little while we were far enough out to be over our heads with those Jap chicks and their male masters howling up a storm on the beach. But I didn't start congratulating myself yet. With all that hardware I saw, they were bound

to have some water transportation somewhere, and it was only a matter of time before they thought to use it. I hoped our luck held and that this crew was the only one to see us make our getaway and would just chase us without thinking to warn anyone else. Anyway, they kept trying to reach us with those guns but the salt water insulated us pretty good, and after a while I was able to grab Kyoki under the arms and haul both of us the rest of the way to the reef. But we weren't there two minutes when I spotted another amtrak making its way to the gap between islands me and my men had gone through the day before.

I stood up as best I could on the submerged reef and waved my arms. They spotted me easy and veered off their course and into my direction. It was Sgt. McGivney's Maulers, the B-team, and they were surprised to see me with Kyoki, naked as the day she was born!

They were all shouting and yelling and ogling at the same time, so it took a few minutes for me to figure out what they were saying, but it didn't matter because the pilot turned the boat around and headed right back to the Higgins. I found out later that the test had been due three hours before, but that Command had delayed the firing until the fate of my squad could be discovered. But with my report, McGivney radioed ahead and advised an earlier firing, like as soon as his boat was out of range. In another hour the new experimental low-yield neutron personnel bomb was on its way to the supposedly deserted target island. If it hadn't been deserted before, it soon would be! I didn't waste any tears on those Jap rats, mostly because Kyoki was keeping my mind off such things with some tricks she'd learned in geisha school.

LESBIAN MUDWRESTLERS

BEHIND BARS

by Charles Hoffman

It was in all the papers. The television news crews arrived outside shortly after the drama began. So you're sure to have heard about the bloody riot and subsequent hostage crisis that took place at the Stonehaven Correctional Facility for Women. But the whole story is known only to a few. What went on inside those stark grey walls while the authorities, police task forces, and media reporters kept their grim vigil outside has yet to be revealed in its entirety. Only now can the truth be told. Most of the events here recorded have heretofore been known only to myself, some of the prison's staff, and, of course, the women.

I had served as warden at Stonehaven only a short time before these events took place. Then, as now, Stonehaven was home to approximately 6,000 hardened female offenders. The majority were young, but with lengthy juvenile records. After reform school, they graduated to Stonehaven. The average age of the inmates was twenty-four.

The day I assumed the position of warden, I was given a tour of the facilities. The inmates were products of broken homes, the streets, and bad upbringings. For the most part they were what their environments had made them: spiteful, foul-mouthed, and rebellious. But although none of them were debutantes, most of the girls were rather attractive. In fact, some were quite beautiful.

As I made the rounds of the cell blocks, I was followed by a chorus of whistles and lewd comments. With no little embarrassment I endured invitations to "party" in solitary,

and obscene suggestions as to how they might earn time off for "good behavior."

Tensions ran high at the prison. Shut off from the rest of the world, the women of Stonehaven were starved for men. Inevitably, some made the best of the situation by entering into Sapphic relations with cellmates. Others gave vent to their seething frustrations through wanton acts of violence and cruelty against their fellow inmates.

The biggest trouble spot in the entire prison was Cell Block H. The problem here stemmed from the intense hatred between two of the girls. Each was a formidable streetfighter from the slums, and each longed to settle the question of who would call the shots on the cell block.

The more vicious of the two was called "Slash." From the neck down she was perfection, with the body of a Venus. Her once-beautiful face, however, was marred by an ugly red scar that ran from forehead to jaw on one side, the result of a knife-fight when she was thirteen. Predatory green eyes blazed from her scarred face, which was framed by an unruly tangle of night-black hair. Her countenance was quite fearsome, particularly when distorted by anger, a not infrequent occurrence.

Slash's hated rival was named Angie. Angie had a body that was no less tantalizing than that of her foe. She also had the unmarked, perfect face of an angel, which drove Slash into fits of furious envy. She was blonde and blue-eyed, and though a child of the streets, she did not seem a criminal type

by nature. It was said that she was innocent of the murder of her boyfriend for which she had been convicted, and her case was being appealed.

Both girls were lesbians, but where Angie had merely adapted to circumstances, Slash despised men utterly. Slash had harassed and bullied many of the girls on the cell block into joining her harem. Those who wouldn't go along fell under Angie's protection.

Things really heated up between the two when Slash tried to use a broom handle to rape Angie's cell-mate/lover, Baby Sue. It was Angie to the rescue, then, and she flew at her enemy in an unrelenting vicious attack that soon had Slash on the ropes. Angie might have killed Slash then, but fortunately the matrons arrived to drag them apart.

Another such incident took place not long afterwards. Angie was distracted in the showers by one of Slash's cronies, and Slash caught her off-guard with a sucker-punch that staggered the blonde. Angie fought back as best she could, as Slash pressed her advantage. The two of them scrapped like soaking-wet naked hellcats, with Angie getting the worst of it. Again, the fight was broken up when the guards intervened.

The trouble on Cell Block H was but one of many problems I endeavored to solve during my first weeks as warden. I often worked late into the evening. On those nights, rather than return home, I slept on a couch in a small room to the rear of my office.

One such night was September 23, the night of the Big Breakout. Rain began to fall shortly after sunset, and by midnight was a raging torrent accompanied by lightning and great crashes of thunder. I tossed uneasily on my couch in a troubled sleep. Sometime in the wee hours, my office door was kicked open. I started groggily awake. Illuminated by flashes of lightning,

a hardened, desperate group of women advanced toward me, led by Slash.

At first I thought I was still dreaming. Then Slash grabbed me and thrust a gun into my face. As my head cleared, I realized what must have happened, but pieced the whole story together only later.

Slash had been planning a break-out for some time. But security at Stonehaven was so tight that even if she and her confederates made it out of the cell block, they still couldn't get much further. She decided that her best chance was to release all the inmates and take over the entire prison. She enlisted the aid of inmates in all the other cell blocks, and they struck simultaneously, neutralizing the overwhelmed security staff. They broke into my office just moments later.

As I was marched out into the main compound, I saw chaos all around. Much blood had been shed during the battle with the guards, and both guards and inmates lay dead in the corridors. The prisoners were trashing the place as their pent-up frustrations broke forth in a full-scale riot. Broken glass and other debris littered the floors. Small fires were burning here and there.

The rain stopped around dawn, and Slash had managed to quiet the inmates. Lookouts were placed along the prison walls, for it would not take the outside world long to discover that something was wrong at Stonehaven. Staff members, including myself, were taken hostage and herded together in a reception area overlooking the grounds. Guns were trained on us at all times. I was handed a telephone and told to relate to the Governor exactly what the situation was.

By mid-morning most of the prisoners were milling about outside, mainly on the rooftops of the lower buildings and various paved areas because the heavy rains had turned the prison yard into a bog. Outside the walls, police, National Guard,



and SWAT teams had assembled, and representatives of the media were beginning to arrive.

Slash was by this time on the phone herself, making demands of the authorities outside. She had enlisted the aid of all the other prisoners by saying that the take-over was a political act to protest conditions at Stonehaven. It came as no surprise to me, however, when her actual demands included a million dollars and a helicopter to fly her and a few cronies to freedom.

I tried to reason with Slash: "For God's sake, woman, give up this madness. They'll never give in to your demands. And if you start killing hostages, the Guard and the SWAT teams will storm the prison and more lives will be lost. And what happens when the other women find out you've lied to them?"

Her response was to produce a wicked-looking switchblade and thrust it menacingly at my groin. "I'd keep quiet about that if I were you, Warden, or you can wave bye-bye to your dick."

I fell silent then. Admittedly, I was cowed. But another was not. From the crowd assembled below our vantage point, a bold figure strode forth. It was Angie, and she pointed an accusing finger at Slash.

"You're going to get us all killed when they try to take this place. You don't give two shits about prison reform. You're just using all the rest of us to buy yourself a ticket out of here."

"Lies! Lies! Lies!" Slash shrieked hysterically. But the expressions on the other women indicated they were more inclined to believe Angie.

"Then show us your stuff," the shapely blonde replied coldly. "You and me, bitch. Single combat."

Slash had no choice but to pick up the gauntlet. She descended to the ground floor and emerged from the building to meet her foe.

Angie and Slash faced each other

over the muddy expanse of the prison yard. The other women surrounded the yard on all sides. A hush had fallen over all assembled. Without a word, the combatants stripped off their prison uniforms, which were likely to hinder movement, and stepped into the yard stark naked!

Their feet sank deep into the mire as they approached one another warily. The clinging mud made sudden moves such as leaping and dodging impossible. Both girls knew the contest would be decided by brute strength and viciousness. When they were a few feet apart, they lunged at each other simultaneously and the battle was on.

Angie and Slash slammed together head on and strained against each other like two football linebackers. Well-toned muscles stood out in definition under smooth white skin. The stalemate held for a second, then Angie flipped Slash over her hip in a deftly executed maneuver. Slash tumbled clumsily through the air to land sprawling in the muck.

The dark-haired girl lay still for a second, then began to rise, her footing unsteady. Clumps of mud were stuck in her hair, and her arms, legs, breasts, and belly were slimed with it. The blonde stood over her laughing, unsullied by the filth around her, hands on hips, magnificent legs braced wide apart, full breasts jutting proudly forth, like a Valkyrie.

Slash snarled, the livid scar on her face twisting like an angry red bloodworm as her features contorted. She dove forward, clutching Angie about the waist in a tackle that bore them both down. Mud spattered as they landed. Angie lay on her back, Slash astride her smiting her face and breasts with stinging blows.

Desperately, Angie scooped a handful of mud and hurled it full into Slash's face. The black-haired vixen reeled back. Angie's supple legs locked about Slash's torso

in a scissors hold and drew her down. Angie tried to scramble up to reverse their positions, but slipped and slid in the mud.

This momentary reprieve gave Slash the chance to wipe the mud from her eyes. Both girls managed to rise to their knees, then unsteadily to their feet. By now they were completely coated with mud from head to toe. It plastered their hair and dripped from their limbs and torsos. And in that brief moment as they stood face to face before resuming their struggle, I was suddenly struck by an aesthetic appreciation of the remarkable beauty of these two young women. Even covered with mud, they were breathtaking. The shiny brown mud glistened on their superb bodies like a candy coating and, despite the peril of the situation, they looked as delightful as two delectable chocolate Easter bunnies.

The girls took a moment to catch their breath, then the battle continued. They stood toe to toe now, their sleek leg muscles standing out in relief as they braced themselves erect in the slippery morass. Thus poised, they flailed at one another like Furies. Each heaped grueling punishment on the other minute after minute, mud-plastered strands of hair whipping back and forth, breasts jiggling and bobbing madly . . .

Finally they staggered back from each other, teetering on the verge of exhaustion. Sweat ran rivulets through the slime that coated them. Their heavy, mud-covered breasts rose and fell as they gulped in air. Their trim bellies heaved

in and out as they stood panting, like two sleek greyhounds after a close race. Their flanks and buttocks trembled with the fatigue that burned in their legs.

The world seemed to hold its breath as the tableau held. Then, with a sudden burst of renewed vigor, Angie struck like lightning. She lashed out with a roundhouse right that clipped Slash squarely on the point of the chin. Slash toppled, and Angie's own momentum carried the exhausted blonde down along with her foe. Slash landed face down in the mire, and Angie flopped atop her. Angie pushed Slash's face deeper into the mud until the scarred one's struggles ceased.

Angie rolled off her enemy and rose. With her foot, she flipped her vanquished opponent over onto her back. Slash was unconscious, but still breathing.

It was all over then. The other hostage-takers surrendered their weapons. The prisoners gradually dispersed and went peacefully back to their cells. I got on the phone and informed the authorities stationed outside the prison that the crisis had passed.

Not long afterwards, Angie's conviction was overturned. A jealous rival confessed to killing her boyfriend. I was happy to convey the good news to Angie personally. Angie told me she was going to make the most of her freedom and travel across America. I don't know where she is tonight, but I wish her well. All Stonehaven owes her more than we can ever repay.

BAYOU KINGDOM OF

UNDEAD CUTIES

by N. Leo Lancer

I guess I'm just not the kind for a steady job. I can't stay in any one place for too long, either. A while back I was just sitting back waiting to see where the trade-winds would take me, and they picked me up and dropped me in New Orleans at Mardi Gras time. All the fancy floats and colorful costumes were really pretty disappointing. You could tell it was only the tourists who got excited. I guess it was the closest most of these secretaries and office managers would ever get to a wild time, but I had seen wilder. Much wilder, believe me.

So I sat, bored and drinking, in a sidestreet dive with a tableful of other jaded drifters like myself. There were the usual tall stories, probably lies mostly, but we'd all heard the same crap in a hundred dumps like this one before, and it got stale pretty fast. Finally one unshaven face that reeked of raw whisky more than the rest spoke up. I got the impression he had to get pretty loose to say what he was about to say.

"Listen--'f'you bums wantsta have one helluva time, don' waste yer money here! This Mardi Gras stuff, it ain't nuthin'! Th' real action's outside o' town--way outside. The broads're like none o' you scum never laid eyes on. I been plenty times. Those whores, they beg me t' come back an' bring m' pals."

With that he dug a wrinkled and wine-stained card out of a pocket somewhere and managed to drop it on the table--just before he passed out, dropping his red face, snoring, right on top of it.

"Hell, why not?" I said, grabbing

his hair and lifting his head up like a sack of sand. I picked up the card and dropped the head back, with a loud thump, to its resting place. He didn't seem to notice. "You fellows interested?" A few were.

I went to the phone, fished up a dime, and made the call. While it rang, I remember thinking how I didn't for a second believe that windbag had actually visited the brothel he was describing. He'd probably lifted the card off some other poor bum who had, though. At any rate, the place (there was no name on the paper slip, only this number) had a reputation, and it might be worth checking out.

The phone rang and rang. I was about ready to hang up when finally someone picked up. There was a thick Caribbean accent of some kind, and it was tough to understand. Eventually I did get things worked out, though.

It was pretty strange, all right. The place was deep into the bayou country, and they had to--believe it or not--send a van out to pick up customers! Some way to do business! But maybe they had a product to sell that they knew people would take some trouble for. By now half of my motive was plain old curiosity. By nature I'm a thrill-seeker, I guess, and it doesn't always have to be sexual.

Two and a half hours later, my buddies had been swilling more booze and weren't in much shape for a trip to the cathouse. But I tried to sober up a few of the ones who had some decent bucks left in their pockets and got them outside, where the van was already waiting at the

curb. Service, huh? We climbed aboard the dented VW minibus and rattled off for the city limits.

The whorehouse turned out to be way out into the swamp country. You could tell the swamp had spread gradually over the years, engulfing almost all but the road itself, which was built up on a raised foundation. But the road surface was in real bad shape. Nobody was taking much care of it, and I knew it couldn't be too many more years before the whole area would be under marshy water.

Soon the van was making its way precariously through a jungle of vines and cypresses. You could hardly see any sunlight, and the humidity was becoming just awful. This had better be damn good, I thought. Heat and hooch had combined to put all the other passengers under. The driver, a shirtless, muscular black, was silent. I just counted crocodiles and watched the road till the house itself finally came into view.

It was an old plantation home, three stories high with a huge veranda and massive columns out front. In its heyday, generations ago, it must have been magnificent. Now it was at least imposing, but maybe ominous would be a better word. Paint was peeling, some windows were missing, shutters hung askew, and thick vines were beginning to drape the place like ivy. It really looked haunted, to tell you the truth.

We pulled to a stop, and the driver waited while I shook the others awake. They stumbled out of the van, a pretty sorry-looking bunch, and the silent driver waved for us to follow him. He opened the great front door and held it open while we filed through into the hall.

The light was pretty dim but you could still see it had once been a beautiful place. The hallway was decked out with huge hanging red velvet drapes, now caked with

the dust of decades. Between these hung large, elaborately framed paintings of nudes in various seductive positions. There were antique tables with old hurricane lamps on them, only one lit, the rest long ago broken, which accounted for the dim lighting. Every step we took kicked up little clouds of dust from the worn rug. It was obvious the place had once been of the very highest class of old-time bordellos, but why the owners had let it sink to this state of squalor mystified me.

The driver had disappeared to somewhere, but his place was taken moments later by the proprietor of the establishment, the pimp. A tall oak-panelled door creaked open and out came a small black man in a white suit. His face seemed intensely black, like an African or a Haitian, and all the blacker by contrast with his suit, itself a clean exception to the filthy condition of everything around him. He wore old, rimless glasses and had a thin goatee with a mustache that began at the far ends of his upper lip. He spoke in a lilting accent, the same one I'd heard over the phone a few hours earlier.

"I'm so glad you gentlemen could come and visit our palace of delight here in the old part of Louisiana. I'm sure you will find that here we still know erotic pleasures that have been forgotten elsewhere. Let me introduce my girls. I know you will find them to be both beautiful and ever so . . . cooperative."

More forms passed through the door, about eight to ten, and what forms! Every one was a stunner like I'd never seen in my life! Represented were a variety of racial groups: Haitian, Cajun, mulatto, Mexican, and more. They all turned around for display, all in choreographed unity. Each one was a totem pole of long sleek legs, firm and rounded buttocks, thin waist, melon-like breasts with various idioms of nipple. It was only when your

lazy lingering eyes moseyed up past their necks that you were in for a different kind of surprise: their faces, though beautiful, were completely blank! Features and eyes were totally devoid of any expression. My rapidly arousing lust was short-circuited by a little catch of nausea as I noticed that some of these babes' eyes had no iris! It was like their eyes had rolled up into their heads . . . like the dead!

The little black man was now urging us to make our choices. I don't think most of the half-drunken oafs with me even noticed the eerie condition of the whores. They weren't too far from the same state themselves, I guess. Anyway, spooked or not, I figured I might as well do what I had come for. I gave the whole chorus line a quick scan and chose the one who looked closest to normal. She was a black beauty, with skin that almost seemed to glow.

All the happy couples began to disperse, entering the darkened hall from which our hosts had come, then splitting off into various rooms branching off the hall.

I had wondered how these bedrooms would look. There was a four-poster canopy bed, scarlet wallpaper, huge mirrors. The same impression of faded glory: dust covered the lot, the mirrors were cracked and blistered, the bedcurtains were torn and frayed. But the juices were soon flowing again as the big black girl collapsed face-first onto the bed, sinking into its lumpy mattress, rolling onto her back and extending both arms and legs in an inviting yet crude pose. Her face was still expressionless. But what the hell--I wasn't going to be critical. I whipped off my shirt with one quick motion, pulling it over my head without undoing the few fastened buttons. I kicked my shoes off as fast as if I'd found a snake in one of them and lost no time undoing my pants. I was

on her, in her, in a second. She was nice, but passive. Huskily I grunted, "Come on, bitch . . . cooperate a little, cantcha?" My wish was her command. Like a machine she responded, smoothly rocking with just the right rhythm. I was going crazy, on my way to what promised to be the most terrific climax I'd ever known.

Only the promise was broken. I could feel my load beginning the last leg of its journey when suddenly a pair of strong wiry arms grabbed me from behind and pulled me out of the black cave of love. The woman's face had finally begun to show some feeling--a strange kind of . . . hunger, I guess, that I can't really describe--but as I was hauled away the arc of flying semen splattered against her breasts, missing its mark, and she lost all expression, all animation, and tumbled back into the bed like a sack of potatoes, raising a cloud of dust as she fell.

I halted my backwards fall, shook free of the entangling arms, and struggled to regain my balance. I stood naked, bathed in sweat, aflame with frustrated lust and anger facing my attacker--a five-foot tall, wizened black crone! Her face beneath a knotted kerchief scarf was a mass of leathery wrinkles. She wore a shapeless grey smock with a faded flower pattern. Her spare and twisted form gave no clue of the power lurking in those gnarled old arms.

Seeing her, some of my fury abated.

"Okay, old woman, what the hell's the idea? Dontcha think I'll pay? Is that it?"

She looked toward the door and motioned me to silence as she whispered, "No, no! I am trying to save your white hide! Leave de girl and follow me, quickly!"

Something told me to do just that. I grabbed for my pants, stepped into them, and followed her down the hall, which was now pitch

black except for one candle she carried.

The old witch led me into a kitchen all the way down the hall. From here we made our way to greater seclusion in a little nook that must once have served as the butler's pantry.

"Lucky for you I save you before white man kill himself with his own cock," she said, pointing at me scoldingly.

"What do you mean, old woman? Have these girls got some kind of disease?"

"Worse, much worse! They are zombies!"

Before I could decide whether to laugh or not she continued.

"They are like you saw, walking dead . . . until they receive the seed of the male. Then become wild beasts, tearing flesh, wallowing in blood."

The night wasn't getting any less hot or steamy, but somehow, as I stood there in the cobwebbed alcove, candlelight playing over the black crone's face, I had begun to shiver. The impossible now seemed quite believable. But if it were true, what about the guys I'd brought here?

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. You mean these whores are not human? They're demons or something?"

"The old man you meet: he is bokor--sorcerer from island of Haiti. Bokors make people from villages zombies: give them secret drug made of blowfish and toad. They seem to die, bokor know better. He dig up before they really die. Zombies become his slaves . . . work in canefields for bokor or people who buy them from bokor."

"Only old man, one day he realize whores much more valuable den field slaves. So he move to bayou, find this old place. He look for pretty girls and make them zombies. They do anything for dirty white men, then kill dem, take money, bury dem in swamp. No one come to look for dem."

Somehow, even though it was the craziest thing I'd ever heard, it all made sense. Just then I got some proof. Almost in chorus, blood-chilling screams started to ring out all over the building. If the old woman hadn't pulled me away when she did, I'd have been screaming, and dying, right along with them.

Maybe you're wondering how I felt about these guys' dying; after all, I was the one who'd brought them here. Wasn't their blood on my hands? Yeah, I guess it was, but I'll admit I only felt a momentary pang of regret. All of them were just boozehounds and drifters. Not a one of them was any great loss to society. My death wouldn't be either, for that matter, but right then I was most interested in how to get out in one piece, one living piece, hopefully.

I tried to get ahold of my nerves; I had a question I had to ask the old woman.

"All right, I believe you . . . at least something terrible must be going on around here. But tell me one thing . . . why not let me die like the rest of these guys?"

"Because you must help . . . you must release girls from the old man's spell!"

"Whoa! Wait a minute! Why me? And why now? It sounds like you've been a part of this little operation for quite some time. Why do you suddenly want to spoil the old boy's racket?"

At this line of questioning, the woman's mood, already grave, became infinitely sad. I thought I spotted a lone tear slowly tracing a route over the ridged surface of her downturned face.

"You see . . . the old man . . . the old bastard . . . he is . . . my husband. The girl you were with . . . she . . . is our daughter!"

I could tell the pieces of the puzzle were coming together, but I couldn't see the picture yet.

"All the time, I know what he

do is wrong, but he is my husband, and I must obey. Until one day our daughter Jonquille come of age and the old man feed her the drug! 'She too pretty a flower not to pluck,' he say. I say nothing but to God I say it will stop. Tonight is the first time he send her out with others; you are the first, so I stop you from havin' her, to save you both. You must help end it all."

This was the most incredible thing I'd ever heard, but I was in it now, and I might as well finish the crazy business.

"OK, I'm game . . . but how? If there's a way to stop it, why can't you do it? You know this voodoo stuff, not me."

"It must be a man. Listen . . . you know legend of undead? How to lay them to rest?"

I thought a moment: "Well, one version is that you stake them--I mean drive a stake through their heart. You mean you want me to kill your daughter and the others? I can't . . ."

"No, no, white man. That is but the cipher. The truth of the legend is this."

Before I could stop her, she reached down, unzipped my fly, and grabbed me.

"This is the stake that sets the zombie-women free."

She let go, and I zipped up again, more confused than ever.

"What? You must said that sperm turned them into she-beasts . . .?"

"Just listen . . ." she mumbled as she reached down into her shirt, retrieving a leather pouch. "Here is ancient potion of wolfsbane, mandrake, many potent herbs. You smear it on. It will make you able to have dem all and when you do, it will break de bokor's spell. You see, I know some magic, too."

Immediately the problem hit me. Those screams had given me reason to believe the first part of the story: once the babes got sperm they went berserk, became killers.

But the old woman, for obvious reasons, had never tried this antidote. If I screwed one of these broads and it didn't work, I'd be dead meat before I got to zombie number two! Well, at least I knew to defend myself. The undead cuties had had the advantage of surprise with the other poor schmucks. Hell, I told her I'd do it.

"What's the plan?"

"I must go to rooms and clean up the mess, like always. You stay here and sleep. You will need it. No one know yet you are not dead like others, so no one will look for you. Take de pouch. In morning use the potion, den go find girls. They stay in the rooms you saw. I warn you, though. Somewhere you will meet Antoine--he is the guard, drove you here."

I remembered those muscles. I knew I'd have a hell of a fight on my hands. But I'd won hells of fights before. She left. I slept.

I awoke with the crimson smoky light of the bayou sunrise in my eyes, coming through the grimy window of the dilapidated kitchen. I stretched, and reviewed my plans. I dropped my pants and applied the stinking cream in liberal doses. I could feel it tingling already. Who knew what the hell I was putting on my cock? I just hoped it didn't drop off before I was through.

Peeking around corners as I went, I retraced my route of the night before, exactly the same route in fact, because I wanted to start just where I left off. With the black beauty I now knew to be Jonquille, the old woman's daughter--and the daughter of the black sorcerer, too, I had to remember.

There was the door I wanted; I was sure of it. Given her robot-like state, I didn't think she'd mind much if I entered without knocking. The door opened on the scene exactly as I'd left it the night before. Jonquille lay sprawled lifelessly on the dusty bed.



It was damned eerie, I'll tell you, as if I were returning not only to the same place but to the same moment in time. Well, why not? A quick look down told me I was ready for action.

I stripped, climbed onto the bed, and mounted her. She was dry, but the magic ointment lubricated her well enough. I'm sure no other guy had ever had a bigger challenge with a frigid broad than I had then, but as I pumped relentlessly, I began to notice signs of returning life. But what did they mean? Was she returning to the land of the living--or turning into a worse monster than before? I was ready to pull out, turn tail, and run bare-ass out of there.

Luckily, the old lady knew her stuff, because finally the light dawning in those gorgeous, now intelligent eyes. I withdrew. It seemed the gentlemanly thing to do.

"Oh . . . oh . . . what am I doing here?" she said like someone waking from a deep sleep. When she saw we were both buck naked, she reached for the covers and pulled them over her breast, while I stepped back onto the floor and found my pants again. She reddened, and I started to think of what to say.

I had only produced an embarrassed syllable or two when the door flew open, crashing against the wall, and there stood Antoine, the guard. Like me, he was bare-chested. He stood there, hunched and ready for a fight. I had been in fights before, that's not what unnerved me. What got me was his vacant, unfocussed stare: he, too, was a zombie! I hadn't gotten a good look at him yesterday.

I dodged his first blow, the momentum of which carried him off balance. I took advantage, with a kick to his ribs, knocking him back against a table, upsetting a lamp. This he grabbed up, wielding its heavy base as a club. He

caught me grazingly on the shoulder, hard enough, though, to make my whole right arm numb. I tried a fast left to his jaw, but besides bruising my knuckles, this had no visible result. He tried with the lamp again, but this time I dodged it, and the force of his attempt carried the heavy object out of his hands and with a loud impact to the floor, an impact that would have crushed my skull to pulp if the blow had found its mark.

By now I was able to size him up, and I decided that his advantage of insensitivity to pain was nearly negated by slow reaction time. He couldn't think quickly. It was almost as easy to avoid his blows as it was difficult to land one he would feel. I kept trying.

A kick square in the groin seemed to slow him down for a moment, but that was all. Pain wouldn't do it, then; I had to actually disable him. But how?

In the huge mirror I caught a glimpse of Jonquelle shivering at the far edge of the four-poster. Poor kid! She wakes up from a zombie-coma only to see this! Then it hit me like a ton of bricks--the mirror!

My next evasive lunge carried me to where he had dropped the lamp. I grasped hold of it. He thought I meant to hit him with it. Instead I lobbed it at the huge sheet of glass, which broke into huge jagged plates. It was too thick simply to shatter. That's what I was banking on. While Antoine hesitated in confusion, I seized one of the oblong pieces, wrapped one palm in a length of torn bedsheet and swung the glass like a sword, lopping off the poor undead bastard's head with it. Hell, it wasn't doing him any good anyway.

You can imagine how Jonquelle began to shriek as the headless carcass tumbled to the floor, limbs splaying at crazy angles like those of a marionette, befouled by its own blood, gushing from the severed

neck-stump like a lawn sprinkler.

I rushed to the bed, put my arms around her shuddering shoulders and tried my best to say something calming. I don't remember what it was, but it must have worked. Confident that I was trying to help her, she followed me, still in her birthday suit, out into the hall.

Remember, I still had a good morning's work ahead of me, though I didn't think I'd mind. All I told Jonquille was that I had to try to free the other girls the same way I'd freed her. She understood. I picked a door and tried it.

We were both surprised at what we saw. It wasn't a bedroom like the others. In it was set up a large wicker peacock chair on which the witch-doctor, Jonquille's father, sat as if he'd been expecting us.

"My daughter! How nice to see you again! Feeling better now? And here is your young man! We have met before." He stroked his goatee evilly, his elbow on his knee.

"Young man, I believe you mean to visit my other girls. Let me save you some trouble. Here they are." He snapped his fingers. The snap seemed to echo, not its sound exactly, but some other kind of vibration.

And suddenly there were all the rest of the girls, naked and beautiful like the night before, but different. This time they weren't expressionless. Their eyes were on fire, their beautiful faces now twisted in bestial fury. It couldn't be true, I told myself, but their open, slavering mouths seemed to bristle with fangs! The crowd of about a dozen seemed desperate to get at Jonquille and me, straining at the leash like hunting dogs who've smelled blood. They awaited only their evil master's word. Would the old devil actually send them to tear not only me but his own daughter to ribbons?

I assumed a fighting stance, though after that round with Antoine, I was pretty much out of steam. I told Jonquille to get behind me, to leave the room if she could.

He must have given some invisible signal, because the wild-eyed cuties started to charge. The first, a mulatto, sprang toward me. I cocked my arm, sent it out with the best punch I had left . . . and struck empty air!

The air shimmered. The girls were gone, all except Jonquille, of course. Something else was different, too. The old bokor was no longer seated on his throne; instead, he lay slumped like one of his zombies, the handle of a kitchen knife protruding from his blood-bubbling back. Behind him, her arms folded over him protectively, was--you guessed it--the old woman. Now she spoke.

"You save my little girl, white man; now I save you from my husband's witchcraft. He deceive you, cast spell. Now you and Jonquille are safe. I have done what I should have done long ago. Now go and free others. Jonquille, stay here." She rose from the gory corpse and stepped toward her daughter with open arms. Jonquille ran to embrace her.

I left this tender scene to start doing some embracing of my own. I entered room after room, where the zombie nudes rested inertly. They didn't have fangs, that was only part of the old man's hypnotic spell. I found that the more far-gone the girl looked, the longer she'd been a zombie, the longer I had to work on her to bring her out of it. I had to reapply the cream, which I still had in the leather pouch, several times. It was amazing how the stuff really worked! Number one, the chicks didn't kill me; number two, no matter how many of these babes I screwed, I was ready for more in only a few minutes!

By that evening, all the women were back to normal, more beautiful than ever since their faces were now lit by the lusty vitality native to all their races. Reluctantly I found clothing for them all and loaded them on board the van. The old woman insisted I take Jonquille back to the city with the rest while she stayed to bury her husband according to some special Haitian ritual that no white man could see. I told her I'd be back for her the next day.

I got behind the wheel, and we took off. Just before we lost sight of the old mansion the whole place exploded into a blinding inferno! The old woman must have used more of her secret gimmicks to make the whole pile go up like that! She couldn't have survived it. Somehow both Jonquille and I knew it was

best this way. She came up behind me and put a hand on my shoulder. For a moment she put her cheek next to mine, and I could feel a tear.

Jonquille and I are together now, and having a wonderful life. She's all any man could ask for. Oh yeah; I know what you're wondering: what about the old woman's potion that kept me going, girl after girl? Well, the formula died with her; Jonquille knew nothing about it. I was excited when I realized there was still a little of the stuff left in the leather pouch. Of course, I took it to a chemist the first chance I got. What a fortune a guy could make with a product like that! But you know what he told me? It was nothing but alligator fat! Maybe it really was magic after all.

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brave Green Beret vets from their mind-control but it actually hypnotized their Vietnamese commie wives into becoming God-fearing, commie-hating, right-thinking American patriots!

And when the tape wound down

so did all the hatred and rage and the husbands and wives all quietly went home--the wives all singing "Yankee Doodle Dandy" with their Vietnamese accents--and damn well meaning it this time!

MENACE OF THE MAIL-ORDER BRIDES

by Gary Lovisi

The war was over, but for most of us it would never really end, it just churned and bubbled and overflowed in our guts like a red-hot lava volcano about to burst any moment. But we tried--tried to live with the volcano inside--and came back home to resume our lives as if they had never been interrupted.

I was doing some of that now as I went to visit an old Green Beret buddy named Mike DeLeon. I used to call him Mike de Lion, and the name stuck because he was a big beefy fellow and a wild Green Beret Viet Cong-munching machine. He was a good guy to have at your back in The Nam. Got me through some tight spots.

The thing about Mike that surprised me was his new wife. Oh, she was a beauty, all right, Mike always had an eye for the ladies, but she was Vietnamese. This surprised me. He'd met her a short time after the war through a mail-order bride system that matched up Vietnamese women with American men for marriage.

"It's pretty common around here, Gil," Mike told me once he had me seated and we were killing off a couple of sixes of Bud, just like in the old days.

"Yeah? But how can such a system operate with the country under Commie rule?" I asked incredulously.

"Ah, no sweat, Gil. The war's over and the girls want to come here to America. Better life. More opportunity. And we want them here."

At that point Mike motioned me into the other room, where Sara--it seems she'd taken an American first name as well as her husband's sur-

name--was exercising to a workout video. She certainly was a trim little package, with long slim legs, dark hair glistening in the sunlight as she moved, and breasts that were larger than the norm for most Oriental women. She wore a tight black leotard outfit that didn't leave a lot to the imagination. When we walked in and she said hello with that big smile of hers, I could easily see why Mike was now a very happy man, and far from the grim warrior I'd known years ago in the war.

"Ain't she something?" Mike whispered, giving me a knowing glance.

I just smiled back at him, "You seem to be doing all right, buddy."

That night I went with Mike and Sara to a local Vietnam veterans meeting. I was happy to hear that both Mike and Sara were active in this group, and that the organization did a lot for the vets.

It was a big hall, and the crowd was busy filing in. All ex-military men, former Viet vets, and all former Green Berets--many of whom were still dressed in fatigues and boots. Old habits die hard.

Almost all of them brought their wives with them. There was nothing special about that except I was a bit surprised so many of these guys were married at all. In fact, they all appeared to be married and with their wives.

And then I noticed it. It was subtle and a bit eerie to discover, but as I looked over at every couple in that huge room I couldn't help but notice that every single one of the wives was Vietnamese!

"Hey, Mike?" I asked my buddy. The room was now full and speakers

were at the podium getting ready to start the evening's talks.

I looked over at Mike. "So, what goes on here? All these guys can't be married to Vietnamese women?"

Mike never got a chance to answer that because at that moment Sara and a group of the wives were at the podium. They didn't say a word, but one of the wives took out a video cassette and placed it into the VCR that was hooked to the large-screen TV at the front of the room.

It certainly seemed strange to see a famous actress doing her aerobic workout on that screen in a vet meeting, but what was stranger still was when each and every man and woman in that room also began to exercise to the video!

At first I thought they must be some kind of exercise nuts, but when I noticed the glassy looks in their eyes and the blank expressions on their faces, I knew something was very wrong. The men and women now appeared to be almost hypnotized by the tape; even Mike and Sara started to exercise to the words and music of the famous actress on the screen. For some reason that I cannot explain, I said nothing about what was going on and began to play along. Mimicking their exercises, following their moves, and finally realizing that what they were doing wasn't simple exercise at all--but had now transformed itself into a series of potentially devastating combat routines!

So I played along. We parried and kicked and grunted at phantom attackers and when one of the wives shouted, "Destroy USA!" I was further amazed when the phrase was taken up by all the men there, including my Green Beret friend Mike! I knew then that I'd stumbled upon something much more serious than a bunch of exercise nuts or some kind of wacky cult out to make newspaper headlines.

I watched the tape playing up

on the big screen. The famous actress was there speaking to the group about exercises, but there seemed to be some kind of subliminal message--a hidden message--that was getting through to the crowd, some kind of signal that transposed what she was saying into something very different. I was shocked by what I'd seen--and determined to get to the bottom of what was going on here.

When the session was through, Mike and Sara seemed to be themselves again. As if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, we got into their mini-van and drove home.

That night when everyone was asleep I left my bed and went downstairs into the living room and stole the tape. I hid it in my suitcase and planned to take it with me when I left in the morning. I just hoped no one would notice it was missing and that I could get out of the house alive.

The next day we said our fond goodbyes, Mike happy to see me again, Sara saying how she enjoyed meeting me, and that I should drop by again anytime. I said I would be back. Perhaps sooner than they thought.

I walked out with the exercise videotape hidden in my bag, feeling like some kind of a heel, but determined to discover just what was going on.

On the thruway I hightailed it to an old buddy of mine in Westvale, name of Maxie Ciroso. Max was one oddball electronics wizard, and if anyone could decipher the tape and find out what the hell was going on with it, then Max could.

"Well, Gil, it ain't exactly my line but I'll give it a look-see. I'll call you later in the day with the poop."

"Thanks, Maxie," I said, "you know this is all pretty important. Maybe crucial."

"Sure. Don't worry, if anyone's

playing with Mile's head, or any of these other Nam Green Berets, then I'll figure it out."

I got the call from Maxie that afternoon. He sounded angry and flustered. "Better get over here right away, Gil. This is more serious than I thought. You've stumbled upon something that could destroy the entire country."

Well, I reached Maxie's place within the hour, gas pedal floored all the way. He chain-smoked his stogies and didn't say a word as he ushered me into his lab and practically pushed me into a seat.

"Okay, we got serious shit going on here. I decoded the tape. What appears as a harmless exercise video actually is a very sophisticated mind control device aimed at our ex-Green Berets. It is planned to turn them into inhuman monsters--then set them loose upon the country in a rampage of death and destruction that's never been seen before. They plan to kill business and political leaders throughout the country and cause our whole system to collapse into chaos and murder. And the thing is, they can probably do it if they're not stopped!"

Max held up the exercise video. We put it on the screen and watched it for a few minutes.

"Seems harmless enough," I said, wondering what secret Max had discovered to this horrible plot. He quickly turned off the machine.

"Can't watch that for too long, it already begins to have an effect. Now look at the same tape once I've blocked out the high resonance signals that operate upon the viewer's subconscious."

Max flicked a switch, and the constant low-pitched murmuring I'd noticed as background noise and had thought a defect in the tape instantly faded away--to be replaced by the same famous actress now speaking very different words to the viewer.

". . . and Amerika and its fasc-

ist corporate degenerate structure will crumble. Soon we proceed with Operation Crush--each one of you, all former elite Green Beret troops of the running-dog imperialist system, will be set loose upon targets to begin a spree of valiant proletariat vengeance. You will receive your orders very soon now; in the meantime--Die Amerika! Kill the corporate fascist warmongers!"

Max and I watched completely stunned. When it was finally over I said, "This is terrible. There has to be something we can do to stop their terrible plans?"

"I'm afraid it might be a bit more serious than I ever thought, Gil. These guys have been turned into walking time-bombs, but they haven't really done anything yet. If we go to the cops with this we may blow the whole thing wide open and the leaders might get away. Anyway, who the hell will believe such a story? Not those idiots in charge downtown, they can't even deal with a few drug dealers."

"What about a way to reverse the process?"

Maxie looked at me then as if I'd dropped out of an alien space-craft. "Damn, Gil, that's it! It could be done, no sweat. All I gotta do is step-up the hypnotic effect of the tape and then encode the message--from one of commie-warmongering to one of good-ole USA apple-pie patriotism."

"But will it work?"

"It'll work, Gil. Just give me a couple of days and I'll fix this tape up so the commies would never guess it's been fooled with. Talk about subliminal perception--we'll do a little bit of subconscious tinkering ourselves on these rat bastards."

I heard from Maxie three days later. He had good news.

"Gil, I've fixed that little mother up real good. Added a few things that'll surprise those commie



scum. Boy, are they in for a surprise! Fool around with right-thinking American war heroes, Viet-pounding, Green Beret, real macho men! This'll free them, Gil, from the commie grasp."

So I picked up the tape and then gave Mike a call. He wasn't in. Sara answered the phone.

"So how's things?" I said, making small talk.

"Fine, Gil, why don't you come by? I know Mike would want you to wait for him."

"OK, Sara, I'll be right over."

I got the tape and ran out the door. Something sounded fishy, Sara sounding a bit too friendly, too happy to see me. Or was it just my imagination? Maybe she'd figured it out, or missed the tape, but then again she might not have--the vet group only met once a week, on Wednesday nights--and this was Wednesday!

"Good to see you again, Gil," Sara said. "Mike's out, but come on in and you can wait for him. We can have a little talk while we wait."

"Sure, Sara," I said, making nice-nice, all the time hoping she didn't suspect I'd copped their brainwashing tape. I had it in the bag with me now and hoped I'd get an opportunity to return it to its hiding place before it was discovered missing. Then tonight they'd all get a sure-fire surprise!

I sat down and tried to relax.

Sara said, "You want a drink, Gil?"

I said, "Not right now, thanks."

She said, "So how you been?"

I said, "OK. I keep busy."

She said, "I bet you do."

Before I could ask what she meant by that she smiled and said, "So what you got in the bag?"

I froze up inside, but tried to act casual. "Oh, nothing much, just an old videotape I thought Mike would want to see," I lied. I used to lie pretty good, but I knew I was sadly out of practice.

I smiled and Sara came over to me, slowly, casually, and then in an instant she suddenly attacked, coming at me like a mad bull, leaping for the bag, and almost knocking my head off with a powerful kick as she passed! I was stunned, reeling, as she came at me with a lot of fancy Kung-fu type stuff that had me as batty as a flounder.

"American dog!" she screamed.

"Do you think we are stupid! Yankee-swine!"

"Ah, shut yer trap, you commie bitch!" I shouted back, trying to get up as she came at me again. She was lithe and spry and remarkably strong and powerful for her size and sex. She was a trained North Vietnamese soldier, in prime condition and trained in all the arts of war. And she hated me as a symbol of everything she'd been taught to hate.

I gave her a few punches that grazed her body, nothing that got close enough to stop her, and then she drop-kicked me back with a shot that any mule would have been proud of.

I grabbed at her shirt, ripped it in two places. Flesh sprouted forth, but I was too busy with our battle to really notice.

The fight was fast and furious but it was over in a short time. I'm sorry to say that I was no match for Sara, her fighting ability and agility, and the roundhouse kicks she landed upon me soon had me knocked out cold.

I awoke in a small room, bruised and battered. I found myself securely tied to a heavy wooden chair, alone and scared, helpless and waiting for the inevitable to show its ugly head. Thoughts of torture, more beatings, and eventual murder clouded my mind. At that moment I would have given anything for a fully automatic M-16 loaded with a long clip of hollow-point slugs. Such is the stuff dreams are made of when you're in that type of nasty situation.

And then the door flew open and two big Vietnamese commie thugs entered, and at the urgings of Sara they carried me--chair and all--out into the huge auditorium. Here I heard the sounds of grunting and groaning and other martial arts sounds of exercise--and over the tumult of hundreds of voices was that same famous actress from the videotape. She was there on the big screen as the tape played on, all the vets and their commie-spy wives rapidly falling under the spell of the subliminal messages of hate and anger it produced.

And then Sara came over, her eyes, like everyone else's, glazed and distant. The humming of the tape beat a background chorus that worked its mind-control magic upon everyone in that huge room.

Sara's face was twisted with hatred and anger. "Yankee-dog! You think we did not guess that you stole our tape? You were a fool to come back!"

I said nothing, while the two huge commie thugs held my head in such a manner that I was forced to view the tape as it played on the screen in front of me.

It didn't take long after watching that damn tape for me to feel its effects upon me, strange feelings of anger and lust intermingled with a sense of rebelliousness and revenge. These feelings grew and grew as the power of the tape droned on incessantly. The subliminal message of hate entering my mind, churning it upside down and infecting it with all kinds of loathsome and unpatriotic thoughts. Thoughts of death and destruction.

"Kill the Americans!" someone shouted in a glazed stupor.

"Yeah, let's do it now!" a big ex-Green Beret shouted, pounding his fists together in anticipation.

For an awful minute it looked as though everyone in that room was about to go on a mad killing spree right then and there, but then just as suddenly there was

a change in the message of the tape. The humming noise was noticeably stepped up to a frantic level; everyone's heads jerked involuntarily forward to stare with blank-eyed intensity and expectation at the big screen's message. It was like an irresistible force, drawing us all to it, demanding that we listen and do exactly as it said. And we could not disobey!

And then I realized the truth: Sara had used Maxie's tape! And Maxie had left some of the original commie message on the tape--and then spliced in his own special message. That's what was coming on now!

What I now saw set my heart to racing and my feelings for Old Glory soaring to the highest heights. For now we were bombarded with a plethora of wonderful symbolic imagery that we could not refuse--all the glory that the USA stands for--the good country--the land of freedom and bravery and mom and apple pie. And we all cheered when we saw John Wayne fighting VC in a classic scene from The Green Berets--and we raved and shouted while our gallant helicopters flew over the Vietnamese countryside to the tune of Wagner's Valkyrie music from Apocalypse Now--while we next saw that VC-loving actress in a much younger version of herself dressed in wild outer space garb doing a sexy strip tease in the weightlessness of space to the opening credits of Barbarella.

And soon every ex-Green Beret cheered for the glorious US of A--and by the time that video had ended there wasn't a dry eye in the house--man or woman--and God bless the Duke and his Green Berets, and Robert Duvall and his unbridled macho patriotism--the sweet smell of napalm in the morning--the bald eagle plucking the eyes out of old Ho Chi Minh--and damn if the messages in that tape not only freed our

CHANGE FROM YOUR DOLLAR

A Jack Hagee Story

by C. J. Henderson

It isn't often one picks up their draw and finds their attempt to fill an inside straight has been successful. Especially when they need two cards to do it. I had thrown away a three and a seven, holding onto a nine, a ten, and a Jack. Picking up an eight and a wild two was the highlight of my morning. Hoping I'd masked my excitement and gratitude to the gods, I eyed my hand, carefully putting on a bluff mask. My only hope of winning lay in convincing everyone else at the table that I was bluffing. It wasn't going to be easy. They were a sharp bunch of guys.

To my immediate right sat Grampy. He wasn't old, it was just a nickname his wild, pepper-gray beard had earned him when we were both with the Special Forces. That and the ever-present beer bottles he hides behind keep his raw features unreadable. He was by far the most dangerous player at the table, with a steel-hard poker face and the nerve of a Russian cavalry officer.

Next to him sat Rich Violano. The only one at the table who didn't drink, Rich used the chewing of a constant stream of munchies to keep his face too animated to read. That, along with the rigid, fact-seeking expression he'd created for himself over his ten-year career as one of the city's top crime reporters made him no pushover either.

The Lil' Doc was to his right, running his hand through his hair, worrying at his ever-expanding bald spot. The Doc was not a great player, but he had learned to read the rest of us over the years. If the others sensed a winner at the table,

he would pick it up from them.

Finally, to my left was Hubert. Hu's main tactic for baffling the competition is continually to crack wise. His never-ending string of jokes, sarcastic comments, and insults has won him plenty of pots by annoying the concentration out of those playing with him.

I had this pot, though. When we lay our hands down, I reached forward and swept the careless pile of bills toward me without waiting for anyone's approval. The circle of groans around me was all the confirmation I needed. Grampy threw his cards down in disgust.

"That's it," he cried. "I'm callin' a time out."

As he lumbered off toward my bathroom, Hubert called out,

"D-don't fall in, f-fatso."

"You," Grampy threw the words over his shoulder, "I kill later."

"Geek murdered in New York detective's apartment," shouted the Lil' Doc. "Film at seven."

"Hey," added Rich, stretching his round body, "let's have a little respect for the world of print, here."

"Okay," grinned the Doc. "Extra edition at your local newsstand at eleven."

"Thank you."

"You're entirely welcome."

"C'mon, you guys," I said. "Let's clear away some of this debris before we get started again."

"Ah, my highest f-fuckin' goal in life . . . to clean up J-Jack Hagee's dump of an apartment."

"Up yours, mutant," I told him, bouncing a wadded paper bag off his head. "You help make it a dump, you help unmake it."

The bantering continued, but work got under way. We had started playing around ten o'clock on Friday night. It was now almost three on Saturday morning. We were surrounded by empty bottles and garbage-stuffed paper plates. The ashtrays were filled, even though only three of us were smokers, and everywhere around the apartment lay open pickle and mustard jars, microwave brownie packages, potato chip bags, and the hundred other scraps and tatters we'd strewn about us while we'd played. As we puttered about, emptying the wastebaskets and reorganizing the grease and crumbs, Rich yelled,

"Okay; how about a round of 'Stupid Crook Tricks'?"

"Sure," responded Hubert. "I g-got one."

"Shoot," I told him.

"H-heard about this one last week. The c-cops c-called up the last known residences of a bunch of crooks--petty guys, but d-dozen of 'em, right? Anyway, they tell whoever they get on the line that the g-guy they're lookin' for has won Super Bowl tickets, okay? So then, they tell 'em where and when to send the 'winner' to get his prize. Then, then they . . ."

Hu started laughing at his own story to the point where he almost could not continue. Catching hold of himself, though, he managed to quiet down and finish.

"Whoosh. Anyway, then they deck out this w-warehouse with 'Superbowl Contest' signs--wait for the crooks, and then arrest the lot of them when they come in. For the price of a few signs, some coffee and doughnuts, and the phone calls, they netted over two thousand guys."

As we all chuckled along with Hu, I said,

"Well, I must admit I heard a good one the other day. Some guy robs this bank once. Then he goes back and robs it again. Then he goes back and robs it again. And then again. And then, like an idiot, for the fifth time in two

weeks, he walks in again. By this time they have an FBI man behind the counter. So, of course, before the guy even gets up to the window, the fed spots the moron and arrests him. Then, honest, while they're taking him out, the guy has the nerve to ask how they'd caught on to him."

We all laughed again. After the noise died down, Rich offered another true tale of criminal stupidity.

"I saw this one on the wire the other day. Guy walks into a bank, gets up to the teller, points to his belt buckle, which has the handle of a gun sticking out from behind it, and tells the woman, 'You know what to do.' She did, all right. She gave him the money, and then told the police to watch out for a guy with a big silver belt buckle that said 'Greg.'"

"He wore his name to a robbery?" I asked, half disbelieving Rich.

"Scout's honor. They caught him before he could even get home."

We all laughed at that one, long and hard. Agreeing Rich was the hands-down winner, we went back to clearing out some breathing room for ourselves in the midst of the debris we had created. While we did, the Doc asked,

"Hey, Rich, you're a legendary connoisseur of fine food, right?"

"Yes, I am. Yes, I am," agreed Rich vigorously. "Pass the Ding Dongs, will you?"

"Seriously, I wanted to ask you a question."

"Okay; shoot."

"What was the best hamburger you ever had?"

"Can I ask, for curiosity's sake, why you would want to know this?"

"Sure," answered the Doc. "I'm seeing someone new and they're a real beef patty fiend, so I'm just trying to get an idea of good recipes or settings, or, well--you know," he grinned sheepishly. "Anything that'll help the ol' cause along."

"Huuummm," replied Rich, stroking

his chin, his eyes lost in some other world reviewing the great ground beef platters of the past. "There's always Dunaier's, down in the Village. They have a real good burger menu."

"Yeah . . . ?" The Doc's eyes lit up.

"Oh, yeah," assured Rich. "They fry, char, or broil--your preference --and all their toppings are the best. They only use good garden tomatoes and lettuce, no hothouse stuff. And if you want cheese, they pile it on. Real cheese, too. No imitation, cheese-like, processed cheese-food substitute--cheese. Real cheese."

"Kid," yelled Grampy from the bathroom, shouting over the roar of the flushing toilet, "if you've got a date to impress, do yer cookin' at home."

Coming back into the living room/kitchen area of my apartment, wiping his hands on his shirt, he continued,

"Last time I was out in Jackson Hole, I came across the world's best hamburger. Ya cook this up fer yer new sweetie's dinner an' ya'll be cookin' again fer breakfast, too. Now lissen up.

"First ya take bacon, already half/three quarters cooked, and some of them little green jalapenos, and grind 'em all up into yer beef, right? Then, ya fry the suckers up, no other way--ya gotta fry 'em--then, just hit 'em with a little salt and pepper. When they're done, melt down some mozzarella on 'em, and hat 'em with a thick slice of raw onion--don't cook the damn thing--and you will have yerself one Class A demolition derby of a hamburger; guaranteed to rope you an evenin' a'romance."

While I mentally agreed that Grampy's recipe sounded like it would make a damn fine hamburger, the Doc turned to me, asking,

"What about you, Jack? What was the best patty melt you ever gobbled down?"

"Seriously?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"Well; in all honesty, the best burger I ever ate came from McDonald's."

The predictable groans and boos echoed through my apartment. I reminded everyone that it was three in the morning, quieting them down for the sake of my neighbors, and then told them,

"Look, I'll happily admit I've had better hamburgers than the average McDonald's burger but, the Doc is asking for stories about the best burgers we ever ate, and the best burger I ever ate was in a McDonald's."

"I sense a story here," said Rich, sitting back as if someone had just popped a top movie in the VCR.

"I thought we were gonna play cards?" growled Grampy.

"Ahh," piped in Hubert, "g-give it a break, ya big turd. Haven't you w-won enough of our hard-earned cash tonight?"

"I can never get enough of your cash, dick-face."

"Well, I've had enough cards for a while," said the Lil' Doc. Flopping onto my couch next to Rich, he insisted,

"So, c'mon; tell this story. What made this one burger out of the billions and billions they've fried up so special?"

Putting down the ashtray I'd just emptied, I looked around the room to find myself suddenly the center of attention. Even Grampy had parked himself with a Coors, waiting for me to explain. With a sigh, I got my own drink and chair and told the story.

I'd received my discharge from the service a week earlier. I'd been assigned to Military Intelligence during the last two years of my tour of duty--where I'd first met Grampy. Neither one of us were the college man/ROTC type they liked to put in charge of things. But we were clever at killing people and blowing things up, so they put

up with our obvious lack of breeding and utilized our talents for the good of America's goals around the world.

Two years of sneaking around in Southeast Asia and Central America were enough for me. Grampy left long before I did, fed up with the whole system of the government owning the keys to the jukebox, gifted with the opportunity for early retirement via an intense shrapnel wound in his leg.

At the time, I had no idea of what I wanted to do with my life. I had a girl back home I thought I should probaby go marry, as if that would somehow clear all the confusion out of my system. It didn't, but I wouldn't discover that until later.

Taking stock of my feelings, I realized that the service had wrung me out--used me up. I felt as if I were in my sixties, tired, useless, feeble. Death's grin hunched over my shoulder often in those days, whispering insanities in my ear, calling me to join it on the other side of the cold divide.

At that time, the first answer that came to me for every situation was a violent one. The checkout clerk is too slow, slap her silly; waiter doesn't get the order right, gut punch. Cop handing over the speeding ticket--kill him. Kill his partner. Car's rented under an alias . . . no way to trace me . . . tracks covered. Clever as ever. Don't take shit. Don't take it--kill anyone who presents a threat--remove every obstacle.

Not that I actually slipped. I kept the rage and the laughing whispers bottled inside, fighting the pressure with logic and hard-won self-control. But my discharge'd put me out on the street with the rest of the civilians, and it was a disturbing set of circumstances. I had about three hundred pounds of souvenirs and junk I'd dragged around the globe from post to post

with me stashed in the trunk of my rental car, and a hefty bankroll, but that was it, all my worldly goods.

None of it amounted to anything that spoke of a life of even modest proportions. It was just bric-a-brac, photographs of people and places with little meaning, junk picked up on street corners and novelty shops. Toys and clutter and the garbage of youth, bundled up and shoved in the back of some corporation's car.

I decided to drift for a while, not able to think of anything better to do. After my discharge I had no real place to do. My home life had always been a withering, callous joke to me. My C.O. had some influence in the real world. He said he could pull some strings, get me on a police force somewhere, which of course meant more uniforms, more orders, more death and killing, and all the rest of the pain that had driven me from the service in the first place. When the voices had started I'd almost panicked; the little whispers in the back of my head, urging me to violence at any opportunity, towards others or myself, were too tempting.

Deciding to try something else, I rented a car in San Francisco, the first place my feet touched down in the country. After that, I bought a sleeping bag, some basic supplies, and food for a few weeks, tossed it all in the trunk with my cardboard-boxed mementoes and got out of the city, quick.

I needed to get away from people --away from the cars and their noise and dirt, away from the screeching and the whining, the never-ending lights and cement and shuffling mobs. Stopping at the Grand Canyon'd seemed like a good idea at first, but it washed out quickly. I couldn't take the tourists, asking questions, being too cheerful, too friendly. You can't get angry at someone for being decent to a fellow human being, but I wanted to, badly.

so I got back in the car and kept moving.

I finally ended up in the Rockies. I found a dirt turnoff, what appeared to be an abandoned logging run, that left the back road I'd been following. It was nothing more than a trail through the surrounding trees, one filled with rocks the size of garbage cans and ruts deep enough to hide a dog. It was a slow drive, one which did my renter little good, but did not bother me. It was perfect. When the forest finally fell away on both sides, it emptied out onto an overgrown plain of tangle brush and young trees. There was no one in any direction. Which was just what I needed.

Setting up camp took fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes after that I was a mile back in the woods, wandering. I had a lot of questions to work out, and a lot of anger with which to deal. I wasn't even sure what I was angry at or about. I just knew I was, and that I had to do something about it before I tried dealing with people again.

Figuring that being alone out in the country would help, I kept walking. I hiked until it was dark, and then made my way back to camp. The next morning when the sun woke me up, I went out in a different direction, again not returning until nightfall.

I followed the pattern for the next few days--eating a little here and there, sleeping on the ground under the trees, swimming in freezing mountain lakes, barehandedly scaling the few cliffs I found--trying to put the destructive voices in my head aright. The air was fresh and biting, the lake water clean and brisk. I didn't see another soul, or wish for one around. For most people it would have been a dream vacation. For me each day was worse than the one before it.

My mood grew darker, my vision clouding over in a red haze for hours at a time. I started talking

to the countryside around me, threatening, imploring, begging answers from the sky and the trees--answers to questions I did not know--all of which only served to make me angrier. I had removed myself from society to allow my bad mood to blow over, but it hadn't worked. Now I was spoiling for a fight, looking for any excuse to employ the tricks of my recent trade and beat the living hell out of something. It was the worst time possible for what happened next.

On the fourth morning of my little wilderness holiday I went out again, but returned in the early afternoon. Frustrated with the results of my 'cure,' I had decided to pack and leave, not knowing or caring where I went next as long as it was away from the quiet of the mountain top.

As I approached my camp, I heard something larger than the rabbits and chipmunks I'd been seeing for days moving ahead of me. Curiosity dispelling my anger for a minute, I glided through the trees, eager to see who was poking around my site, and what it would take to provoke them. I found more than I'd expected.

The noise was coming from a bear, nosing my car, breaking the windows and digging at the trunk. I came into the clearing shaking my fists and screaming. The bear paid me scant attention. Picking up a rock, I threw it beanball hard and straight. It came in smoothly and bounced off the bear's head. Smiling to myself smugly, I shouted at it again, warning it away from my possessions, less angry with life merely because I'd had the chance to inflict a little pain.

As I neared the car, still shouting, the bear came around the front end, exposing its full face. It was a grizzly. A large one. A very large one. Suddenly, my self-destructive mood cleared a bit. I held my ground, but didn't advance any further. The bear stared at

me, swinging its massive head from left to right, trying to get my scent. Luckily there was a slight breeze in my face, keeping me upwind. The grizzly, not knowing exactly what it was facing, kept trying the air, growling deep in its throat, challenging me.

Its growls turned quickly to roars. It didn't take a Rhodes scholar to figure out that my companion was mad, and for some reason about more than getting banged in the head with a rock. This grizzly was spoiling for a fight, looking for something to smash just for the fun of it. The damage to my renter vouched for that. Coming all the way around the car, the bear stretched up onto its hind legs and then roared again.

I roared back at it, bellowing with all the hate I had in me. It roared again, slapping at the air with its claws, showing me it meant business. I picked up a thick branch near my feet and swung it over my head, growling back, letting it know I felt the same.

The grizzly took another step forward, continuing its challenge. So did I. As we drew a tiny fifteen yards from each other, the danger I was in began to dawn on me. The animal in front of me was not a simple black or brown bear--it was a grizzly, one standing nearly nine feet tall, and looking as if it would tip the scales at well over a thousand pounds. Any one of its claws weighed more than the knife on my belt. Its teeth, long, curled, and jagged, were dark with the tartar of many years.

Suddenly, the tiny part of my brain that still cared whether or not I lived or died began to get that fact through to me; I was facing a monster. A giant monster, one that could run thirty miles an hour. A monster fast enough to knock fish out of a river with one swipe, and strong enough to kill a horse with one blow. It was not a cub, nor on its last legs;

it was a tremendously powerful brute in the prime of its existence, filled with rage and looking at me as a place to deposit it.

As it stepped forward I roared again, loud and long, reaching down into the bottom of my lungs for every bit of air I could find. The bear hesitated. Whatever was driving the animal choked for a moment, instinct cautioning it. Caution ruled only for the moment, though. Its ribcage expanded as it sucked down a breath. Leaning forward to keep its balance, it roared back, a howling threat that shook the trees. The challenge went on and on, shaking branches and the air around us. It was not a bluff; I was not facing an animal that was going to be cowed. I had squared off with a monster, one that then decided the pregame entertainment was over.

Still roaring, it took its first step forward. I roared back, shaking my branch, kicking dirt in its direction. It continued on its way. I hefted the club in my hand, checking its sturdiness. It was a good three feet long, sure and solid as a baseball bat. The grizzly continued toward me, not measuring its steps but merely walking forward--now it was no longer challenging; it was just closing distance. I spread my feet, planting myself firmly.

We were down to the last few yards. The beast came closer, still thundering its rage. I screamed back, daring, taunting, waiting. It stepped up in front of me and reached down, massive arms and paws grabbing for me. I swung from overhead, bringing the branch down on its closing paws. The branch broke, splinters filling the air. The grizzly howled and swatted at where I had been. Bouncing away from the swinging paws, I threw the piece of wood still in my hand, catching it on the snout.

The raw edge of the wood tore open its nose. Blood sluiced into

its mouth, giving it a taste of the damage I had done. It lunged again, cutting the air with its claws, missing me by inches. Dancing away, I speculated on my chances of getting back to my rented, wondering what good it might do me. True, my rifle was there in the trunk, but it was only a .22 Long, good for small game and deer if the shot was well placed. Even if I could get to the car and get the trunk open and get the rifle free and loaded, it still wouldn't be enough weapon to handle the bear.

It came at me again--charging on all fours. I leapt to the side again, but it turned and followed me, quicker than the last time. I dodged it and then kicked, bringing my steel-toed boot upward into its throat. It did no good. The bear was too well-muscled, protected by too many layers of fat and fur. It was a blow that would have killed any human being. The bear shrugged it off as one would a luck punch on their birthday.

Taking advantage of my surprise, the grizzly stood and turned, closing its arms, nearly catching me in its powerful grasp. I ducked and punched it in the side, searching for its kidneys, twice, three, four times. Annoyed, the monster clipped me with a backhanded slap, sending me reeling.

I stood clumsily, like a drunk getting up off the ice. Nothing was broken, but where the beast had connected, my left shoulder was a knotting slice of pain. I stumbled back several yards into the trees with no strategy in mind, not even the beginning of a plan forming. The bear, already having forgotten whatever damage I might have done it, turned and followed. It was slower, more cautious now, but just as determined. Blood dribbled from its muzzle into its mouth, mixing with its frothing juices, creating a scarlet saliva that splashed freely on the ground as it stalked me.

I picked up the occasional loose

rock or branch and hurled it at the following monster, but to no avail; there was no deterring it now. I had started something and it was going to see it through to the end. I had caused it grief and it wanted me dead. It was as simple as that.

We were moving uphill through the trees. The grizzly had learned its lesson. It no longer charged or took to its hind legs. Staying low to the ground and always on a straight, closing angle to me, it pushed its way closer, confident that sooner or later it would have me. For my part, I had to keep one eye on the terrain above me and one on the bear. I couldn't turn and make a break for it; the grizzly was too fast; it could run me to ground in a matter of seconds.

Taking too many backward steps while watching the beast, though, almost finished me. Before I saw it, my left foot went down deep into a tiny, marshy pool. Sticking for a second, it came free only with effort. The lost moment became the monster's chance. Throwing its head back with a roar, it charged forward full force.

I broke into a run then, slopping through the mud, tearing through the trees as fast as I could manage. My brain cleared, leaping back to basic training--remembering twenty-mile marches with full packs--ten-mile runs--days of exhaustion that pushed me far further than I'd ever dreamed I could be pushed. I ran uphill, trying to keep my wind, dodging trees and brush, setting a jagged pattern in an attempt to keep the bear off balance and unable to gain speed.

I wanted to look at the monster on my tail, but I forced myself to remember the words of my C.O., Major Rice: looking back wastes time and energy, throws you off your track, and gets you killed. If things get to the point where you have to run, then run, and don't look back!

I ran. Moving across the side



of the mountain, I dodged left then right then over again. I circled large rocks and tore straight through brush; if I approached two trees close together from the left, I would cut to the right upon exiting, anything to slow up the bear and hopefully extract myself from the mess I'd put myself in.

After ten minutes my chest began shrieking the strain of the chase to the rest of my body. Running uphill in weighted boots over bad terrain, for those who haven't tried it recently, is quite an exercise. Holding back the pain, though, I kept running, ignoring the lead spreading down my legs, the thin, slicing folds of agony pistonning through my arms and shoulders. I begged out further yards, ignoring the red shoots of pain stabbing at me, forcing my feet to keep pumping, up and down, up and down, up and down, constantly pushing myself away from the bellowing thing on my trail.

Then, rounding a small corner of rock, I spotted a bramble tangle a couple of hundred yards down the mountainside. The only problem was it doubled back toward the direction of the bear. If I made for it, there was a chance the grizzly might cut me off if he caught on to what I was doing. Checking over my shoulder, I saw the beast had decided to try a tactic of its own. He was actually ranging up the mountain behind, but above me, working upward so he could force me down.

"Well," I thought, "you want me down--you got it!"

Turning suddenly, I jumped from a small bluff, dropping ten feet in a second. Hitting hard, my feet skidded on the surface leaves and loam. I tried to stop but couldn't, my slide continuing unabated until a tree finally loomed in my path that I could not avoid. Slam! I hit it with a stunning thud that shut my eyes and showed me stars. My right arm went numb, hanging

useless as I tried to stand. Shaking my head, I slid my back up the tree, working slowly to stand until I remembered . . . the bear.

Reality came back to me in the form of harsh, guttural roars. The thing had spotted me quickly and changed its course to come charging down the mountain after me. Forgetting my pain, I rounded the tree and fumbled off for the bramble tangle I'd spotted before. I closed the distance in stumbling leaps, half jumping, half hobbling. Behind me, the grizzly's steps came in precision thuds. Front paws hitting the ground--bang. Back paws pushing off--boom. Bang, boom. Bang, boom. Closer and closer behind me, thundering down the mountain.

Reaching the brush, not bothering to look back to see if I would be followed into the thicket, I dropped to all fours--face in the dirt--and crawled forward as fast as I could. Thorns tore at my face and hands and neck, spikes gouged and bled me. My legs and arms, sides and back and head flowed freely, none of the clothing I wore heavy enough to protect me. I was thirty feet into the mess when the monster hit the edge.

I'd hoped it might be tired of our game and leave me alone within the den of pain I'd chosen as a hiding place. I might as well have hoped for peace in the Middle East. As I watched in horror, giant, outfield's glove-sized blurs of fur and claw tore their way into the tight-knit jungle of needling pain. Whole bushes and saplings flew through the dirt-choked air. What it couldn't knock out of its way it trampled underfoot with complete indifference.

I'd entered the thicket in a fear run, ignoring the agony of advancement until I could go no further, hoping I'd gotten far enough back to protect myself. Now, seeing that I had to move out again, every new pain was immediately realized. I stayed as low as I could,

trying to go underneath the majority of it all, but it was no way to make speed. Behind me, the grizzly tore forward, vines and branches pulling it back, tearing its skin and fur away in noticeable chunks.

It closed the distance between us--fifteen feet, another lunge--twelve feet. I scrambled further, it threw itself forward--ten feet, step -- nine feet -- eight -- five--three--

The monster's bleeding jaws snapped at my retreating feet, crunching, tearing the brambles away between me and it. The grizzly was thoroughly entangled now, creepers and branches wrapped around its neck and front paws in a criss-crossed mess that simply would not allow it to move any further. Barely aware of the monster's restraints, I continued to drag myself away from it, my arms smeared with blood and crushed leaves and mud.

Then my hands hit rock. Lifting my head, I could see I'd hit a small boulder. Taking a chance, I pulled myself atop it hoping for a view of some way out of my predicament. Looking off to my left, I saw a tall, easily climbable tree not too far away to reach. The only thing separating us was a few dozen yards of open space, and ten more feet of the thicket.

I felt the shape of the rock below me with my feet, trying to find a position that would allow me to jump without slipping. Behind me, able now to see as well as smell me, the grizzly redoubled its efforts to free itself. I could sense the strain on the vines holding it in place, feel the ground loosening around their roots. The beast's nightmare roars washed over me, panicking my attempts to straighten myself on the rock. Then, suddenly, as my feet found their perch, the bear tore free.

I launched myself instantly, landing in the last two feet of brambles. I came down harshly on my side, a number of the thick, inch-long spikes and scores of the

smaller thorns breaking off and sticking in me. Rolling my way free, I regained my feet and hobbled for the tree I'd spotted earlier.

Behind me the grizzly pressed onward, ripping its way through the rest of the thicket. Thorn saplings were pushed aside or broken in half. The monster crashed free a moment after I did, angling across the swath of ferns and grass toward the same destination as me because it was where I was headed.

Reaching the sizeable oak, I grabbed the lowest strong branch and began pulling myself upward. Heedless of the noise behind me, I inched my way up the thick trunk, dragging myself higher as quickly as I could manage. My hands were punctured and sliced to the point where the blood flowed freely any place where skin showed through the dirt. By the time the grizzly reached the tree my fingers had stopped working. Using my wrists like hooks, I pulled myself to a spot some twenty feet from the forest floor and then hung on as best I could as the monster started its assault.

Rising up to its full height, the bear stretched its inhumanly long arms upward, trying to reach me. Seeing it couldn't, it tried to come up after me. Digging its claws in, it tore free chunks of bark and wood the size of door stops, but could not manage the climb. Like most grizzlies, it wasn't built for it.

Giving up the attempt, it threw its head back and roared, letting me know it was by no means giving up completely. It howled again, and then scarred the tree further, stripping away large areas of bark with each swipe. Then, suddenly, it reared back, coming forward in a rush, slamming its massive weight against the tree. Branches shook; leaves fell. I almost joined them. Not pausing, the grizzly threw itself forward again, and then again. The tree vibrated hard enough to hurt my teeth.

It crashed against the oak repeatedly, tangles of bramble vines whipping behind it, still stuck in the fur of its legs and back and neck. I hung on tight in desperation, scarcely able to believe the monster was still after me. My brain raced, trying to figure out why. What could I have done to make the howling thing below as determined as it was to finish me off? Then, suddenly, staring down at the beast told the story.

Sticking out of the thick fold of muscle behind its neck was the broken shaft of an old hunting arrow. Its edges were smoothed; the blood crust circling it dark and hard. Now I knew why the bear below me hated the smell and sight of man and his things--and why it was determined to kill me. And, I knew there was no chance it might tire and leave me alone. Which made it all clear--only one of us was going to walk away from our confrontation.

I had to get clear of my perch, and only one way out presented itself. Steeling my nerve, I sucked in a deep breath, held it, then replaced it with another. As the monster below continued to slam itself against the tree, I caught hold of my nerve, calming my runaway pulse. The bear backed up again, getting ready to crash against our tree once more. Go ahead, I thought. I'm ready for you.

As the grizzly began its run, I changed my grip, ready to release my hold at the right moment. It hit the tree again with a jarring smash. Absorbing the blow as best I could, I took a fast aim and then leaped. Falling fast, one steel-toed boot held straight down as my weapon, I landed on the bear's neck, cracking the splintered arrow lodged deep within it.

A roar cascaded out of the grizzly. It shot up and over, dazed and maddened with pain. Blood broke free in rivers, splattering through the air in response to the animal's

crazed gyrations. I hit the ground awkwardly on one foot and the opposite shoulder, the newest pains heaped on with the rest, all of them begging me to lay still and just let the fight end. Dragging myself to my feet, though, I headed away from the bear as quickly as I could, determined to play every card I had.

By the time the grizzly had gotten its own pain under control and remembered me, I had a sizeable lead on it. One I could not maintain, however. Following my trail, it came through the forest in bounds, sniffing the ground on the run. It sighted me in minutes, howling in triumph when it did. It no longer mattered, though. I had dragged myself as far as I needed to. I was in position to make my last stand.

Without care or subtlety, the bear lowered its head slightly and charged up the slope as I had planted myself atop. Despite the damage I had inflicted on it, it came at me fast, determined to take me with it. I held as still as I could, leaning to the left, trying to signal the beast that that was the direction I would dodge toward when it arrived. It gobbled up the yards between us, snorting and panting its rage, only a moment away.

Finally, when we were only a second apart, I pushed off with all my strength, hurling myself to the right. The bear, angling left as I had hoped, skidded forward as it tried to correct its attack. My plan had worked. Before it could stop itself, the grizzly slipped on the thick grass of the cliff edge I'd chosen, tumbling forward and over in a howling scramble, tearing free two clumps of sod as it went.

I lay on the swath where I'd fallen, panting uncontrollably. I was tired and aching, bleeding in dribbles and spurts from a hundred spots. My lungs ached as fire rippled through them, each breath

an unstoppable, shooting pain. I wanted to just curl up and sleep where I'd fallen, but I couldn't allow myself the luxury--not yet, anyway. After what I'd been through, my mind refused to let me relax until I confirmed that the bear had finally been disposed of.

Dragging myself to the edge, I stuck my head over, and then stared in disbelief. The bear was coming back. My eyes opened to the size of saucers. The bear was coming back. With my mind screaming at me to move, to run away shrieking, I remained frozen, head hanging in the air, mouth agape--the bear was coming back.

It hadn't flown outward far enough to fall to the rocks I'd hoped to smash it against. Somehow it had twisted in mid-air and landed on a slope some thirty feet below. Watching it lumber upward toward me, I realized it probably hadn't even broken any bones. I searched quickly for a stone or log big enough to do some damage with, but nothing lay at hand. Another glance over the edge showed me the monster was halfway back to the top.

Pulling all my remaining strength together, I turned and hobbled back for my car. No escape was possible through driving; the road was far too bad to allow any speed. There was a gun in the trunk, though, and as small as it was, it was the only hope I had left.

As the car came in sight, I could hear the bear behind me, pulling itself up over the cliff edge. By the time I reached the renter, the beast was a mere fifty yards distant. I fumbled the trunk open, amazed I'd been able to retain the keys throughout my struggle, and pulled the rifle free from its hiding place. The bear was thirty yards away. By the time I had the box of shells in hand, it had covered half that distance and was picking up speed. Knowing I had no time to load and aim, I did the

only thing I could; jumping into the trunk, I pulled the lid down and locked myself inside.

Trapped in the darkness, before I could even begin to get my bearings, the bear attacked the car. Its massive paws came down on the trunk over and over, the noise of each blow echoing in my ears. Then, suddenly, sunlight hit my eyes. The bear had managed to puncture the trunk lid with its claws. I had scarcely registered this new threat when another set of holes pierced open above me.

Realizing I had to do something quickly, I kicked at the back seat with all the fury I could muster. Hitting as hard as I could with both legs, I felt the side restraints snap. I kicked again, pushing it free, opening the crawl-space for myself as the monster's claws snagged in the metal above my face. Working my way forward, trying to retain the rifle and shell box as I did so, I started through the narrow aperture.

I got no further than halfway, however, when suddenly the car began to shake violently. Trying to hold my position as well as my weapon, I suddenly lost everything as the left side of the renter was hoisted off the ground. Before I could even register shock, the car crashed to a thud on its roof. The force of the impact flattened the vehicle slightly, the walls of the crawl-space pinching me sharply at the waist. Gasoline splashed down my back, transforming each of my cuts and scrapes into wells of flaying agony.

Desperate the escape the burning cascade, I twisted violently to the side where there was more room, finally making my way into the back seat. Laying on the roof, I held my sides, the skin over my ribs rubbed away from my struggle, gasping desperately to hold back the screams. I had lost the rifle and the shells and hadn't even noticed. Without conscious thought I crawled

for the left side of the car for no better reason than that side was the closest. The random action saved my life.

Just as I began to pull myself through the broken window, the grizzly's head came through the one on the right, its spring-tight jaws snapping at my feet. I pulled myself through and rolled free over the twisted metal and broken glass just as the door frame around the bear collapsed. It pushed its way in up to the shoulders, still desperate to catch hold of me.

Stumbling to my feet, I discovered that the trunk had spilled open, retching my belongings across the grass. I pulled the rifle butt toward me, only to find the barrel had been bent in the overturning. Dropping the now-useless .22, I searched for the only other weapon I could think of. The car shook and bounced and the grizzly tried to extract itself. Seconds later, I pulled one of the flares from the rental company's emergency kit. It was soaked with gasoline, just like the car and everything in it and myself.

Without thinking I yanked the ignition end free, tearing a fingernail in half, the pain causing me to drop the flare. It exploded into life, flames dancing up and down its petrol-soaked length. The grizzly howled with rage in the background, almost disentangled from the ruined car. Knowing I had no time left to think, I reached down, grabbed up the burning flare, and threw it into the gasoline-drenched trunk.

"And . . .?"

I had drifted away from my audience for a moment, lost in the

lateness of the hour and the memory. Responding to the Doc, I asked,

"And what?"

"And," answered Grampy, "what happened next?"

"Oh. Well, that was pretty much it. The bear'd cut its neck open on the car window. Between that and gettin set on fire, and whatever might have happened to it when it went over the cliff, it just gave up the ghost. Never even pulled free from the car."

"That isn't what I meant," said the Doc. "I want to know about the McDonald's burger."

"Oh, that. Well, I had to get off the mountain on foot, then. I'd lost everything that'd been in the car and all my money, except for a loose dollar I found in the grass. It took me until the next day, but I finally got back to the bottom. The first civilization I came to was one of those long stretches of road hemmed on both sides by a hundred stores. I dragged myself into the McDonald's, lay down my money, and got a cheeseburger."

"And c-change from your dollar. You t-took that with ya, right?"

I thought about the bear for another second, something I hadn't done in a long time. I thought about how senseless our whole battle had been, again wondering if it had been the rock I'd thrown that had started it all, or if it would have attacked any man because of the one who'd maimed it.

And, once again unable to reach any conclusion, I stored the memory back in its usual resting place and told Hubert that I had indeed taken my change. Why not, I thought; at the time--not counting my life--it was all I had.

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